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The treadmill of welfare:

**A narrative exploration of sole mothers' experiences of accessing support from the
Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare system.**

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Applied Psychology – Community Psychology

at

The University of Waikato

by

Nikki Wade



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2020

Abstract

Neoliberal ideology has been the dominant political and economic underpinning of the Aotearoa/New Zealand social welfare system for the past forty years. The main neoliberal principles of individual responsibility, free markets, equal opportunity, minimal government interference, and economic prioritisation have seen the erosion of social support systems over the last four decades. State welfare retrenchment, austerity, and increased behavioural conditionality have adversely impacted the wellbeing, health, and potential thriving of sole mothers and their children who require assistance. This research was undertaken utilising social constructionist and community psychology paradigms, focusing on contextual macro factors that have intimate impacts on the everyday lives of sole mothers' lived experiences. Ethical and theoretical underpinnings of the Treaty of Waitangi/Tiriti o Waitangi principles, ecological perspectives, a social justice lens, and the praxis of diversity were applied to explore notions of stigma, shame, citizenship, and the motherhood/out-of-home work paradox. Case study engagements with two participants, Lucy and Rose, were the qualitative methods used to explore the knowledge and experience from those with unique first-hand knowledge of the welfare system. Collaborating with those at the coal face of oppression and marginalisation have revealed structural accounts that challenge the current dominant narrative of individual blame and responsibility for those experiencing hardships. To go beyond surface understandings of participant stories, an in-depth interpretive narrative and phenomenological analysis was employed to make visible the structural institutions that promote and maintain the economic, material, social, psychological, emotional, and physical hardship of sole mother welfare recipients. Challenging the status quo with participant narratives and academic literature, is intended to contribute to a broader understanding of the welfare system and its impacts on the everyday lives of those who require assistance during times of need. In the process, this research reverses the current preoccupation with welfare

recipients as being flawed and in need of modification, to highlight that in effect the system is flawed and in need of systemic modification.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge and give thanks to God, without whom this would have been impossible for me. Thank you for the extraordinary people you have surrounded me with. Thank you for the grace, opportunities, challenges, and blessings you have given to me throughout and beyond this truly difficult process. All glory to you.

To my ever patient supervisor, Dr. Otilie Stolte, I am indebted to you for all you have afforded me over this extended thesis project. As you know this has been quite the challenge for me, throughout which you have shown me constant kindness, compassion, understanding, and care. You have been an integral part in my progresses as a person and as a future practitioner. Thank you for the detailed and clear feedback, your guidance, and your ever impressive depth and breadth of knowledge. I admire your work and I admire you as a person. I do not have the words to express the gratitude I have for all have taught and given me. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Aroha nui.

To ‘Lucy’ and ‘Rose’, thank you for collaborating with me on this project. Your knowledge and insight have been, and are, invaluable. I have enjoyed spending so much time with you both. I hope I have done you and this topic justice. Kia kaha wāhine.

Kia ora to the Māori Research and Psychology Unit, the Acorn Foundation, and to the University of Waikato for their scholarship support and for supporting and recognising the worth of this research topic.

To my four grandparents, my whānau, and my friends. Thank you for your constant interest and encouragement, and for always asking me how my thesis was going, even when that was the last thing I wanted to talk about. An extra special thank you to you Grandma and Grandpa for your financial support over the years with textbooks, course related costs, and other expenses. Thank you to my little sister for stepping in as me this last month to help with our girl’s term project, you are a life saver. To my ‘health team’, Linda and Todd, thank you for helping me see the light and for getting me through.

To mother dearest, how do I begin to thank you. You have been my rock from the start, your belief in me has pulled me up countless times. Thank you for all of the babysitting hours during lectures and on the nights that I needed to go back to campus to study. You have helped me through so much, especially in those first few years when I was sole mumming. Thank you for always offering me comfort, thank you for always being the calm when I was

freaking out, thank you for listening every time I have panicked about the same things yet again, and thank you for always encouraging and never condemning. We made it ma!

To my husband, thank you for your unconditional support. Thank you for understanding my desire to continue my studies, even though they have taken longer than we had planned. Thank you for bearing the full brunt of financially supporting our little whānau and for not once complaining about it. Thank you for (unsuccessfully) trying to help me figure out correct apostrophe usage. Thank you for holding me up and for being my best friend. And thank you for seeing me at my worst and still digging me, you are the best.

To my daughter, we started school at the same time, all those years ago. Look at us now. I did all of this because of you. Thank you sweetheart, I love you.

Ehara taku toa, he takitaki, he toa takitini

My strength is not that of a single warrior but that of many.

Kia ora

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	1
List of Figures.....	3
Chapter One: Introduction	4
The present study	4
Terminology.....	5
Chapter outline.....	6
A review of the literature	6
Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare – A brief history	6
Neoliberalism.....	9
Citizenship and work	10
Austerity and retrenchment.....	13
The entrepreneurial-self	14
Structural violence	15
Labelling	17
Stigma	18
Paternalism and behavioural conditionality.....	19
Poverty	21
Sole mothers and welfare.....	24
Chapter summary	27
Chapter Two: Methods.....	29
Introduction.....	29
Ethical Commitments.....	29
Social Constructionism	32
Theoretical Perspectives	34
Community psychology	34
Ecological perspectives.....	36
Diversity.....	39
Social justice	42
Case Studies and Semi-Structured Interviews	44
Participant recruitment.....	46

Participant engagements	51
Participants.....	51
Interview engagements	53
Lucy	54
Rose.....	61
Analysis	64
Narrative approaches.....	65
Phenomenological approaches.....	67
Feminist approaches and intersectionality	68
Chapter Three: Case Study Analysis – Lucy	72
Labelling and internalisation.....	72
Constrained choice.....	75
Inadequate resourcing	77
Embodiment of poverty and stigma	81
Healthism	84
Chapter summary	86
Chapter Four: Case Study Analysis – Rose.....	87
Citizenship and work	87
Motherhood.....	90
Lack of understanding and care	92
Accusations	96
Behavioural conditionality and paternalism	99
Chapter summary	101
Chapter Five: Discussion, future research, and conclusion.....	103
Lucy and Rose.....	103
Neoliberal welfare.....	104
Community psychology	109
Future research.....	110
Conclusion	110
References.....	112
Appendices.....	126
Glossary of Māori words and terms.....	138

List of Figures

Figure 1. Nested ecological levels of analysis (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010, p. 78).....	37
Figure 2. Tauranga community garden volunteers sharing excess fresh produce and donated bread items.	80
Figure 3. The standard layout of a Work and Income New Zealand office.....	95

Chapter One: Introduction

The present study

The aim of this research is to gain understandings of the lived experiences of sole mothers accessing support from the Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare agency Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ). Undertaken with social constructionist epistemology and community psychology theoretical perspectives I sought to gain knowledge of the research topic within the broader historical, cultural, social, and political situated context. With the introduction of neoliberalism forty years ago, the Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare system drastically changed (Cheyne, O'Brien, & Belgrave, 2008). The changes brought with it a shift in majority attitudes which positioned welfare recipients as a largely marginalised group. Often those who occupy marginalised positions become silenced in areas that have significant impact on their lives. To offer an alternative to the dominant neoliberal narrative ascribed to sole mother welfare recipients I sought to gain their front line life world perspectives and experiences. To facilitate the aim of this research, I collaborated with two case study participants, Lucy and Rose. Lucy and Rose both have first-person experience of WINZ. To facilitate a person centred narrative approach, each of the women and I engaged in face-to-face, one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

Applying a mixed method analysis approach, including narrative and phenomenology analyses, I was able to interpret Lucy's and Rose's accounts and insights regarding their lived experiences of sole motherhood within the context of WINZ. Additionally, I was able to undertake an interpretive analysis of the broader socioeconomic-political structural factors that underpin Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare policy and implementation. Analysis of macro level phenomena within the context of everyday lived experiences assists in connecting the personal to the political, and the political to the personal. With such understandings those in community psychology are able to make visible social injustices that constrain the wellbeing

of people and society. In gaining deep and diverse knowledge community psychology practitioners are able to then engage with decision-makers at the macro political level to assist in preventative transformation.

Terminology

The current research has been undertaken within the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Therefore, I will clarify terms used within this research that may not readily translate to other contexts.

The term ‘welfare’ can be applied to state provision in multiple sectors such as health and education. However, for the purposes of this research I discuss welfare as it applies to social security benefits. Furthermore, to focus the research, the participants and research are discussed as regarding working age (18-64 years), sole mother welfare recipients. Furthermore, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the term ‘case manager’ describes the state agents who are employed at the welfare agency Work and Income New Zealand. I have used the terms case manager and state agent interchangeably.

Many sole mothers do not have sufficient income to sustain themselves and their children. While some sole mothers are not in paid employment, many are in some kind of paid work. However, the challenges of combining parenting and paid work often limit their availability for full-time positions. As a result, many sole mothers are required at some time to rely on welfare assistance to provide or top-up their income. Throughout this research I use the term sole mothers interchangeably with sole mother welfare recipients.

Throughout this research write up I have included te reo Māori (Māori language). Te reo Māori is the indigenous language of Aotearoa/New Zealand. For easy reference please find the glossary of Māori to English translations on the last page.

Chapter outline

To contextualise the current research, chapter one documents a review of the relevant literature. In the chapter, the literature reviewed entails a brief historical overview of the Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare system, neoliberalism as it affects welfare, and the concept of structural violence. Chapter two explores the methods undertaken to complete this research. In chapter two I report the ethical commitments and social constructionist epistemology underpinning my research praxis. Also covered are the community psychology theoretical perspectives utilised and how these were applied throughout the research. Also described are the case study recruitment and engagement processes and lastly, the multiple-method applied analysis approaches are discussed. Chapter three offers the interpretive analysis of Lucy's case study knowledge. The interpretation has been situated within the broader social context as it impacts Lucy and her life world. In chapter four, an interpretive analysis of Rose's case study is offered. This analysis has also been situated within the broader context as it applies to Rose's experiences. Chapter five offers a discussion of the key findings from Lucy's and Rose's case study analyses. Further to this, I offer a future research suggestion and a brief conclusion.

A review of the literature

Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare – A brief history

There has been much written in great detail on the complex history of welfare within Aotearoa/New Zealand (Cheyne et al., 2008; Drake, 2001; Lunt, O'Brien, & Stephens, 2008; Starke, 2008; Stephens, 2008). Therefore, I will not provide such an in-depth account here. Nonetheless, this thesis is situated within the broader context of the socio-political history of welfare (Edmiston, Patrick, & Garthwaite, 2017), and therefore requires a brief overview to contextualise the current research project.

Dating back to the late 1800s, original welfare provision in Aotearoa/New Zealand was in its infancy, having a main focus on pension provision for the elderly. Even so, the *Old Age Pensions Act 1898*, was highly exclusionary, deliberately ostracising those deemed as the ‘undeserving poor’, discriminating against women, Māori (indigenous peoples of Aotearoa/New Zealand), and Asian peoples (Roper, 2008). In the years following, state provision slowly grew, however, narratives of the ‘underserving poor’ persisted. During this time, an early form of liberalism had politically and publicly assigned individual blame and character deficits as the primary causes of hardships that the ‘undeserving poor’ were suffering. Years later, the Great Depression of the 1930s had brought with it uncertainty, mass hardship, and widespread job losses (Roper, 2008).

In the early 1930s those in the lower echelons of socioeconomic society became disillusioned with the government’s economic strategies during the Great Depression (Roper, 2008). Public dissatisfaction during this period led to the majority electing into government for the first time the Labour Party, in 1935 (Cheyne et al., 2008). Due to the widespread hardships resulting from the depression, the newly elected government adopted a Keynesian economic approach in which the state helped to regulate unstable market conditions, particularly during the time of recession (Roper, 2008). The state recognised the need for intervention and chose to formulate and implement policies accordingly. Keynesian macroeconomics saw the progression of means-tested taxation, where higher percentage tax rates were assigned to those with higher incomes, promoting collective responsibility. The state quickly implemented a more comprehensive welfare state by increasing assistance, including in areas of public education, health, social housing, and social security. Socially democratic principles of redistribution were now underpinning policy, with the state’s stance being that citizens had the right to fully participate in society with dignity and have access to sufficient means to achieve this (Drake, 2001). In the following years, during the post-World

War II economic *golden age*, largely, there remained a political consensus regarding the state's role in providing comprehensive welfare to those in times of need and/or hardship (Schrecker & Bamba, 2015).

Following on from the global post-war economic boom, both in Aotearoa/New Zealand and globally, the socio-political climate was changing. The 1960s brought with it unrest regarding class conflict, where pressures between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' were rising, including tensions between workers' wages and business' profits (Roper, 2008). A lack of economic growth in the 1970s, saw low government revenue, increases in business tax avoidance, and high unemployment. Following their election to government in 1984, the New Zealand Labour Party began to systematically unravel the Keynesian policy stronghold in favour of neoliberal-driven frameworks (Cheyne et al., 2008). Major reforms were taking place, advancing income inequality through taxation changes. Those at the top of the socioeconomic food chain were paying less while those in the middle and at the bottom had their taxes increased. Additionally, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) was introduced, which, due to expenditure patterns, was suggested to have had greater impact on those with lower incomes than on others (Roper, 2008). Here began the systemic dismantling of the once collectivist underpinned welfare system, to be superseded by one of individual responsibility, minimal government interference, and highly conditional criteria (Roper, 2008; Starke, 2008)

During the 1980s and 1990s, drastic austerity measures were taken, and a regeneration of earlier 'undeserving' narratives were used to justify welfare retrenchment and to restrict welfare receipt to only those 'who really need it' (Roper, 2008). Following the socio-political shift toward neoliberal principles, Aotearoa/New Zealand saw some of the fastest increases in income inequality within Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations (Skilling, 2016). Although, Aotearoa/New Zealand remained one of the

OECD “*big spenders*” on old age pensions, those requiring working-age welfare benefits did not fare so well (Starke, 2008, p. 71).

In 1991 the New Zealand National Party’s ‘Mother of All Budgets’ was introduced. Many OECD nations were following neoliberal measures of austerity, however, political scholar Starke (2008), referred to the Aotearoa/New Zealand ‘Mother of All Budgets’ as perhaps one of the most radical welfare retrenchments in all of the OECD countries. Many core benefits were affected, income allocation was reduced while recipient obligations increased, as well as eligibility criteria being tightened (Roper, 2008; Starke, 2008). Regarding sole parents, retrenchment had the then Domestic Purposes Benefit (now the Sole Parent Support benefit) weekly income allocation reduced by nearly 11% per week (Starke, 2008). Such drastic changes increased pressure and precarity for the lives of sole mothers and their children. It has been argued that the drastic retrenchment changes to benefits were not introduced based on evidence of effectiveness in supporting people, but on ideological notions of individual responsibility, free market prioritisation, and a roll back on government involvement (Roper, 2008; Starke, 2008). Starke (2008, p. 97) cites leading social policy scholars Waldegrave and Frater (1991) as suggesting that the drastic socio-political changes of that time were “*a strategy we associate with King John and the Sheriff of Nottingham*”.

Neoliberalism

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the societal changes since the 1960s and 1970s have followed those in many majority Anglo-Saxon countries. A significant change has been the widespread socio-economic political shift toward neoliberalism. Although various definitions of neoliberalism exist, for the purposes of this research I offer the definition provided by authors Springer, Birch, and MacLeavy (2016, p. 2),

At a base level we can say that when we make reference to ‘neoliberalism’, we are generally referring to the new political, economic, and social arrangements within society that emphasize market relations,

re-tasking the role of the state, and individual responsibility. Most scholars tend to agree that neoliberalism is broadly defined as the extension of competitive markets into all areas of life including the economy, politics, and society.

Currently, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, neoliberal narratives dominate the socio-economic political landscapes. Even so, it must be stated that hegemonic neoliberalism does not dictate all aspects of society or all thoughts and actions of all citizens (Skilling, 2016). Furthermore, ideas and ideals of neoliberalism can change and vary over time, place, and within policy (Pollack & Caragata, 2010; Skilling, 2016). In saying that, neoliberalism has become largely normalised and has taken a stronghold in many aspects of economic, political, and everyday life (Ehrstein, Gill, & Littler, 2019; Humpage, 2015). Relevant to this research, the key principles of neoliberalism, as shared above, underpinned key policy areas regarding state citizenship rights, state in/action, and state welfare provision and retrenchment (Humpage, 2008).

Citizenship and work

Citizenship can be understood as the relationship between state and person, and that having membership to said state affords certain rights and responsibilities (Giddens & Sutton, 2017). Though not without its own contentions, in pre-neoliberal Aotearoa/New Zealand society, citizenship was largely viewed as having the right to full access regarding social, civil, and political rights (Cheyne et al., 2008). Not only is/was (dependent on your position) citizenship based on legal and socio-political rights, but also on feeling as though one belongs and feels like an equal member of society (Drake, 2001; Mitchell, 2016). As neoliberal economic notions of individual freedom of choice regarding free market consumerism took hold, citizenship soon became attached to engagement in the economy (Cheyne et al., 2008; Mitchell, 2016). In other words, neoliberally speaking, socially constructed notions of ‘active’ citizenship have become largely tied to one’s individual economic responsibilities and ‘choices’ (Cheyne et al., 2008; Garthwaite, 2017; Pollack & Caragata, 2010). For many

in the poorest strata of society, however, economic engagement can be greatly constrained (Drake, 2001).

Attaching citizenship to economic capabilities can be problematic for many people who experience constrained choices and access to affluent socio-economic domains of society (Drake, 2001). For example, those who live on low incomes, in poverty, or who are not engaged in the paid labour market may be positioned as having reduced or conditional citizenship, constructing such social groups as ‘less than’ (Drake, 2001). Interestingly, research suggests that those in low-income employment are not as frequently socially discriminated against or excluded, compared to those receiving welfare benefits. This accentuated exclusion of welfare recipients furthers the ‘underclass’ narrative (Skilling, 2016). Regarding citizenship and social status, Drake (2001) posits that those in power through structural level policies and normative narratives have the ability and choice to inhibit or foster equal citizenship for all members of society. Regarding paid employment and citizenship status, neoliberal ideals of individual responsibility and equal opportunity can be problematic for those who do not, or cannot, engage in the paid labour market. Amalgamating these concepts as the standard of citizenship ignores the potential barriers for those who do not fit the constructed active citizenship criteria (Lightman, Mitchell, & Herd, 2005; Pollack & Caragata, 2010).

Regarding welfare receipt, neoliberal narratives of reduced citizenship have been accompanied by labels of ‘welfare dependence’. The label ‘welfare dependence’ is problematic and brings with it negative connotations, and of further concern is the hidden definition of the term. In a review of the welfare system, the government appointed Welfare Working Group (2010) defined ‘long term’ ‘welfare dependency’ as a consecutive six month period of welfare receipt (Victoria University of Wellington-Institute of Policy Studies, 2011). It is reasonable to assume that life changing upheavals may take longer than six

months to recover from. Regarding political agendas, the use of labels and statistics that discuss ‘long term’ ‘welfare dependency’ have been manipulated to infer lifelong dependence as opposed to the actual basis criteria of ‘long term’ being a consecutive six month period. How the public are exposed to an issue can work to determine the support or rejection of related policy creation (Riemer, 2020; Lucyk, 2016). Providing an example of how such practices are carried out, V. Dale (2013, p. 7) cites former New Zealand National Party Minister Paula Bennett (2012), who stated “...*people languishing on DPB* [the then sole parent support benefit] *for three plus decades without so much as a job interview*”. However, under welfare policy regulations, sole parents must be in full-time paid work when their youngest child reaches 14 years of age. Therefore, the actual criteria required to remain on a sole parent benefit for thirty plus years is not easily met. Furthermore, statistics state that for the 10% of sole parents who have required welfare assistance for a period of ten years have often done so due to caring for sick and/or special needs children (V. Dale, 2013).

There are a multitude of reasons why people may not be engaging in paid employment including personal ability level, job loss, health status, proximity, access to required resources (such as transport), valuing stay-at-home-parenting, access to childcare, discrimination, lack of labour market opportunities, precarity of opportunities, and inadequate wages (M. Campbell, Thomson, Fenton, & Gibson, 2016). Ignoring the structural factors that may inhibit the uptake of paid work, reinforces the ideas of individual responsibility and meritocracy. Further, laying blame on supposed individual deficit behaviours results in the marginalisation of certain groups and people (Hayes, 2000; Hulko, 2009). Pathologising those who are seemingly not adhering to social constructions of active citizenship delegitimises their social status and allows for processes of discrimination and ‘othering’ (Lister, 2004).

Austerity and retrenchment

During times of economic decline or large scale uncertainty, elected governments need to respond. An accepted neoliberal economic strategy is that of austerity measures, which are an economic approach that sees cost cutting to social and public spending via retrenchment (Schrecker & Bamba, 2015). As discussed above, austerity measures were adopted by the Aotearoa/New Zealand government, as well as by other socio-politically similar governments, in response to the economic turmoil of the 1970s. During the state retrenchment reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, Aotearoa/New Zealand had one of the highest increases of income inequality throughout OECD nations (Roper, 2008). Also, during this time, reforms gave way to sharp increases in child poverty rates (Timmins, 2019). Decades on, neoliberalism has become a socio-political-economic mainstay and so has retrenchment.

Regarding welfare provision, austerity and retrenchment are enacted through welfare reforms. Welfare reforms undertaken in this neoliberal welfare era have involved reducing financial spending on many benefits, higher targeting to particular groups, increases in obligations and conditionality, tougher eligibility criteria, increased surveillance, and harsh sanctioning (Curchin, 2017; Gray, 2019; Hodgetts, Stolte, Chamberlain, & Groot, 2017; Starke, 2008; Stephens, 2008). Interestingly, researchers Labonté and Stuckler (2016), utilising International Monetary Fund figures, assert that for every \$1.00 spent on state public investment, there is a socioeconomic return of \$1.60. Conversely, in the United States, a country with severely austere state welfare but with high military expenditure, for every \$1 spent on militarisation, brings with it a loss. These figures are an example of the social and economic benefit to increasing state social supports (Stuckler & Basu, 2013; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Countries with high social solidarity and high state social support are also claimed to be more resilient during economic hardships and in times of recession (Stuckler & Basu, 2013). As discussed above, Aotearoa/New Zealand demonstrated collectivist

responsibility and social solidarity during early recession years with countrywide success. Moreover, retrenchment and austerity measures can cause high level inequality within and between countries, affecting the whole of society (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2017). Countries boasting higher equality tend to experience better outcome measures in areas such as health, education, the justice system, and overall wellbeing (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

Research has shown links between welfare reform enactment and increases in food bank usage, in both Aotearoa/New Zealand and the United Kingdom (Garthwaite, 2017; Gray, 2019). The New Zealand Salvation Army have reported that increased food bank demands have traditionally corresponded with welfare reform dates (Gray, 2019). Interestingly, Salvation Army food bank demand decreased in 2018 during a reported period of decreased beneficiary sanctioning (Gray, 2019). It has also been documented that reduced welfare spending and increased beneficiary scrutiny, conditionality, and sanctioning have negative bio-psycho-social impacts on those who occupy the most disadvantaged groups in society (Garthwaite, 2017; Schrecker & Bambra, 2015).

The entrepreneurial-self

Scholars of neoliberalism have posited that some neoliberal notions have permeated Anglo-Saxon majority culture to become normative (Ehrstein et al., 2019; Schrecker & Bambra, 2015; K. E. Smith, Bambra, & Hill, 2015; Stuckler & Basu, 2013). Moreover, where normative notions are not successfully enacted this can lead to the judgement of ourselves and of others (Cheek, 2008; Ehrstein et al., 2019; Scharff, 2015). One such notion is that of the 'entrepreneurial-self'. The construction of the self as a business, requiring personal responsibility and investment in self-transformation describe aspects of the entrepreneurial-self (Ehrstein et al., 2019; Scharff, 2015). Additionally, perpetual optimism regardless of circumstance, actively pursuing goals, and mastering one's self are also key factors (Ehrstein

et al., 2019). Individual health and wellbeing are seen to be predicated on successfully enacting entrepreneurial-self work, where the individual has become a marketplace site for health and healthism (Cheek, 2008). Within a neoliberal context, there has been a shift from *“health as a right, to, health as a[n individual] duty”* (Cheek, 2008, p. 981). The notion of the entrepreneurial self is propagated through neoliberal principles of naturalised competition, individual responsibility, freedom of choice, and meritocracy. Mainstream psychology has not been immune to this phenomenon, advocating for individual solutions such as therapy, mindfulness, and working to help change maladaptive individual behaviours (Rimke, 2016). Where such applications can be of importance, relying too heavily on individualised solutions can work to hide the structural causes of ill health. Furthermore, one-on-one support from a psychologist is inaccessible to many.

Entrepreneurial-self work is resource intensive, requiring material, psychological, emotional, and physical work. Such high and individualised expectations can negatively impact the wellbeing of those who are in a constant state of striving (Cheek, 2008; Ehrstein et al., 2019). Further, for people living in poverty their ability to participate fully, or even partially, in such work is constrained through probable lack of access to the required resources. However, regardless of structural constraints, the pervasive and normative position of this notion means that not living up to the socially constructed expectations of personal responsibility, healthism, and wellbeing can position people as ‘failed’ citizens (Cheek, 2008). Furthermore, where ‘failing’ entrepreneurial-self work becomes visible, such as through visible poverty or health problems, this can work to undermine social status and connections.

Structural violence

Community psychologists have described structural violence as including the *“production, maintenance, and reproduction of social inequalities and oppressions”* (Dutta,

Sonn, & Lykes, 2016, p. 1). A working definition offered by Lee (2016, p. 109), is that structural violence,

...refers to the avoidable limitation's society places on groups of people that constrain them from achieving the quality of life that would have otherwise been possible. These limitations could be political, economic, religious, cultural, or legal in nature and usually originate in institutions that have authority over particular subjects.

Peace and violence scholar, Galtung (1969), discussed the concept of structural violence as a non-physical form of violence that creates a disparity between what could be and what is.

That is, structural violence occurs when person/group agency is constrained or removed by structures, which leads to disadvantage or disempowerment (Parsons, 2007). Though non-physical in its delivery, structural violence can have devastating effects for those victimised (Hodgetts, Chamberlain, Groot, & Tankel, 2013; Lee, 2016). The harmful effects of societal disparities and injustices, such as the consequences of structural violence, are linked to poor bio-psycho-social wellbeing, including premature death (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Lee, 2016; Schrecker & Bambra, 2015; Smith et al., 2015).

Through socioeconomic-political systems, forms of structural violence have become embedded within society, such as institutional racism, classism, and sexism. That is, many structural violence mechanisms have become normative, while many forms of privilege have been concealed, where both aspects become largely taken-for-granted (Dutta et al., 2016; Hodgetts et al., 2013). The construction of structural violence cannot be attributed to any one individual (Anglin, 1998; Parsons, 2007). However, those in positions of power, as well as media, play a role in producing and maintaining the structural violence found within institutions. Mechanisms of structural violence are often deliberately constructed to benefit certain groups in society while disadvantaging others (Parsons, 2007, p. 175). An example of structural violence maintenance can be observed in a media delivery, given at the time of his leadership, by the former New Zealand Prime Minister, John Key, stating “give

[beneficiaries] *a kick in the pants when they are not taking responsibility for themselves, their family, and other taxpayers*” (Key, 2010, cited in Gray, 2019, p. 71). In this example, beneficiaries are homogenised and misrepresented as lazy, irresponsible, and ‘taking’ from the taxpayer. There is also talk of enacting physical violence towards this group. Thus, perpetuating the stigmatisation and ‘othering’ of welfare beneficiaries. Processes such as this serve a function to the mechanism. Whereby, in this example, politicians can advance their political agendas via populist ideas, such as neoliberal notions, regarding a disenfranchised group of society.

Structural violence can operate as the following, stigmatised social ordering, racism, sexism, human rights injustices, discriminatory policies, punitive institutional processes, and inequitable health systems (Dutta et al., 2016; Hodgetts et al., 2013). Regarding welfare and WINZ, structural violence can be discussed as involving the following phenomena of, labelling, stigmatised characteristics, paternalism and behavioural conditionality, poverty, and the ways in which ideological mechanisms work to delegitimise sole mothers, it is evident that punitive welfare systems are sites of structural violence (Hodgetts et al., 2013).

Labelling

Sociologists, Giddens and Sutton (2017), describe the concept of labelling as a process through which those with power choose to identify certain people/groups as having certain deviant or undesirable attributes that require labelling. Moreover, those that have the power are able to make such labels stick and will do so particularly when the labels serve the powerful a purpose (Lister, 2004; Pollack & Caragata, 2010). How people/groups are labelled can be a precursor to how they are treated and stereotyped. Those with less power, that is, those being labelled, may not have the necessary access to effectively challenge socially constructed adverse labels (Lister, 2004). Labelling certain individuals and groups can be understood as a deliberate form of shaming (Hayes, 2000). Labelling arises through

interactions both personally and structurally, and has the ability to undermine the psychological, emotional, and social wellbeing of those being shamed (Hayes, 2000). Labelling and stereotyping can also undermine interpersonal empathy and social solidarity (Chase & Walker, 2013; Jo, 2013). The complex interconnectedness of labelling and shaming easily leads to the stigmatisation of affected people and groups (Hatzenbuehler, Phelan, & Link, 2013; Hayes, 2000).

Stigma

Closely linked to labelling and stereotyping, stigma has been described as “*Physical or social characteristics that are identified as demeaning or are socially disapproved of, bringing opprobrium, social distance or discrimination*” (Giddens & Sutton, 2017, p. 168). Goffman’s (1963, p. 1) seminal work on stigma explains the ancient origins of the term, explaining that it was a physical bodily marking given by those in power to those they deemed to be of “*unusual and bad moral status*”. Throughout time the concept of stigma has evolved to not only include visible physical marking, but also invisible categorisations embodied within those subjected to discriminatory characterised labelling and shame (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001). Stigma is a result of social and structural interactions that undermine the status of a person or group (Hatzenbuehler, et al., 2013; Pollack & Caragata, 2010). This being due to perceived individualised ‘deviant’ differences that the powerful deem as separating ‘them’ from ‘us’ (Link & Phelan, 2006). Stigma is an interpersonal relational process of external discrimination, stereotyping, and marginalisation which can also become internalised, intrapersonal, and embodied for those at the receiving end of such constructions of deviance and ‘undeserving-ness’ (Davis & Hagen, 1996; Vogel, Bitman, Hammer, & Wade, 2013).

Labelling and stigmatising certain characteristics can have a significant impact on the identities and personal self-worth of those being stigmatised (Giddens & Sutton, 2017;

Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013; Pollack & Caragata, 2010). Early psychologist, Cooley (1902), offered the concept of the looking glass self, positing that our identities can be influenced by the way in which we believe that others perceive us during social interactions (Hodgetts et al., 2020). Therefore, through receiving external messages of social stigmatisation, the process of internalising stigma can occur, adversely impacting on personal identity and self-worth (Vogel, et al., 2013). Due to socially constructed ideas and labels regarding poverty and ‘the poor’, such phenomena have long been associated with shame and stigma (Lister, 2004). Furthermore, where poverty and welfare receipt intersect, added layers of shame and stigma may emerge (Hatzenbuehler, et al., 2013). Where additional identity forming locations such as gender, age, ethnicity, ableness, neighbourhood, and sexual orientation intersect this can further exacerbate categorised stigmas (Chase & Walker, 2013).

Paternalism and behavioural conditionality

In regard to welfare, libertarian paternalism posits that recipients engage with welfare agencies due to poor decision making, lack of motivation, and personal incapability’s (Curchin, 2017; Standing, 2011). Therefore, due to perceived personal deficits, welfare recipients are influenced to make ‘choices’ deemed ‘correct’ by state agencies. It is claimed that without state intervention welfare recipients would continue to make poor choices for themselves and their families, therefore paternalism is ‘for their own good’ (Curchin, 2017; Standing, 2011). However, paternalistic ideas tend to homogenise and pathologize welfare recipients. Additionally, implementation of paternalistic policies has been shown to actively undermine the choices and decision-making processes for welfare recipients, which demonstrates the contradiction of the concept (Curchin, 2017, Standing, 2011). Leading economist, Guy Standing (2011, p. 27) states that libertarian paternalism and behavioural conditionality are “*twin trends*”, with the two mechanism’s operating in synchronicity.

The term behavioural conditionality is described as the behavioural obligations placed on beneficiaries that must be adhered to in order to access entitlements from welfare agencies (Gray, 2019). Behavioural conditions are applied in order to incentivise some behaviours, while some conditions work to constrain perceived undesired behaviours (Gray, 2019). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, sole mother welfare recipients are required to enter into a contract with WINZ that allows the agency to set behaviour parameters, monitor behaviour, and sanction perceived noncompliance (Gray, 2019). In addition, recipients are expected to ensure the compliance of others, such as their children and/or partners (Standing, 2011). Welfare agency behavioural obligations can include the following, welfare recipients providing their financial records for surveillance, being available for seminars and appointments, enrolling children with health and early childhood education providers, being available for 'suitable' work, and taking drug tests (Ministry of Social Development, 2020).

Entering into, and abiding by, a state contract to access welfare assistance could be argued by some as a fair condition. However, welfare state agency contracts based on sanctionable social conditions are not a fair and equitable contract (Tonkens & Verplanke, 2013). In Aotearoa/New Zealand the contract between the welfare agency, WINZ, and sole mothers is described as a 'reciprocal obligation' (Gray, 2019, p. 75). Conversely, anti-punitive welfare research suggests that neoliberal welfare states do not reciprocate their contractual obligation of true social protection for those requiring assistance (Gray, 2019; Parsell, Vincent, Klein, Clarke, & Walsh, 2020). Moreover, welfare recipients are not involved in the design of WINZ contracts and are unable to amend aspects which are not congruent with dignified reciprocity (Standing, 2011). Welfare recipients face penalty if they are believed to have transgressed from their obligations, however, recipients hold little power to allow for challenging sanctions, which undermines fair due process (Standing, 2011). Additionally, WINZ and WINZ staff are not held to the same accountabilities when errors

impacting recipients' livelihoods and lives have been made (Campbell et al., 2016; Hodgetts et al., 2013; Standing, 2011; Tonkens & Verplanke, 2013).

Beneficiaries are targeted with social obligations that are not applied to the wider public, positing their citizenship as conditional and their neoliberal freedom of choice as constrained (Curchin, 2017; Standing, 2011). Standing (2011) argues that targeting select groups of society with obligations and sanctions demonstrates the underlying judgement claims regarding affected groups. Conditional policies and threats of sanctions deliver contexts of precarity for sole mothers, impacting on their health and wellbeing (Beddoe, 2014; Parsell et al., 2020). Such conditional and unequal arrangements that occur between WINZ and sole mothers demonstrates the power disparity between the two parties. Whereby, sole mothers are routinely subordinated and oppressed through personal and structural interactions with WINZ (Beddoe, 2014; Hodgetts et al., 2013; Hodgetts et al., 2017; Parsell et al., 2020). Moreover, narratives of individual responsibility and blame continue to shade the macro level policies and ideology that constrain the lives of sole mothers in complex ways (Beddoe, 2014; Moane, 2003; Standing, 2011).

Poverty

The United Nation's Development Programme (2020) describes poverty as a multidimensional source of deprivation. Poverty is reported as people having constrained access to basic human needs such as adequate food, shelter, and clothing. Furthermore, the United Nations (2020) offer that the experience of poverty extends beyond inadequate income and material hardship to include dimensions of education, standards of living, and health. In concordance, community psychologists, Riemer, Reich, Evans, Nelson, and Prilleltensky (2020, p. 318), suggest that poverty includes inadequate finances to cover basic needs in addition to the understanding that, "*poverty is a lived experience associated with hunger, illness, inadequate housing, illiteracy, human rights abuses, and social*

marginalisation” (original emphasis). Poverty has long been considered a social determinant of health (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Hodgetts, Stolte, & Rua, 2016; Schrecker & Bamba, 2015; K. E. Smith et al., 2015). Living in poverty is associated with many negative psychosocial and health outcomes (Schrecker & Bamba, 2015). Those living in poverty have high exposure to health problems such as chronic stress, anxiety, depression, poor nutrition, illnesses associated with poor housing, lowered sense of self, and sleep deprivation (Lister, 2004; Riemer et al., 2020). Furthermore, those with low socio-economic status are more likely to have poorer health and shorter life expectancy than those with higher socio-economic status (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Hodgetts et al., 2016).

Community psychologists have discussed that the ways in which social justice issues, such as poverty, are framed will direct the remedies taken to address them (Riemer et al., 2020). As discussed, neoliberal hegemonic narratives posit that individual deficits are the cause of people’s welfare engagement and poverty. Therefore, due to ideologically based ideas of individual responsibility, during socio-political shifts to neoliberalism, political decisions were made to make experiences of welfare uncomfortable for recipients (Lightman et al., 2005). These decisions were justified as being incentives to ‘motivate’ ‘maladapted’ people off of welfare and into paid employment (Curchin, 2017; Gray, 2019; Lightman et al., 2005; Parsell et al., 2020; Standing, 2011). Conversely, Aotearoa/New Zealand statistics show that 55% of children living in poverty live in sole parent homes, while 45% of children living in poverty have parent/s in paid work (Simpson et al., 2016). Furthermore, due to the precarity of many low wage jobs and the nexus between inadequate wages and high living costs, many people in paid employment still require some form of state assistance to meet their basic needs (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). These arguments suggest that paid work is not necessarily a way out of poverty (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Lightman et al., 2005).

Additionally, research has suggested that behavioural conditions placed on beneficiaries

further undermine a person's capacity to move off welfare due to examples such as harsher financial restrictions, lowered self-worth, and increased ill health (Standing, 2011).

Inadequate incomes and denials of additional assistance from welfare agencies can also lead to people having to engage with loan sharks to meet basic needs such as buying food, or, to repair or replace household essentials. Thus, people are forced to take on high interest debt to survive, deepening the 'poverty trap' (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Jackson & Graham, 2017; Rosen, 2019). Furthermore, individually focused blame tends to ignore the structural causes of poverty.

Examining the structural causes of poverty moves away from individual pathologising to locate explanations within social, economic, and political arenas (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017, p. 12; Lightman et al., 2005). Personal lives are lived within complex interconnected nested levels of society, often outside of the direct control of individuals (see *Ecological perspectives*) (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Therefore, to understand personal experience and circumstance, a broader view, beyond the individual, must be taken to encompass the many micro to macro factors impacting the everyday lives of those affected by poverty (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Structural influences contributing to poverty can include, labour market conditions, precarity of employment positions, low wages, access barriers to public services such as health and education, institutional racism, high costs of living, stigmatisation, workplace barriers for those with special needs, and proximity to opportunities (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Hodgetts et al., 2016; Lightman et al., 2005; Schrecker & Bamba, 2015).

Structural influences impacting on sole mothers regarding welfare engagement include the aforementioned factors and can also include additional factors such as increased eligibility criteria for welfare assistance, childcare barriers, work hours conflicting with familial responsibilities, patriarchal systems that devalue 'women's work' in the home and in

the low wage job sector, exposure to domestic violence, trauma recovery, discriminatory labelling, and caring for sick and/or disabled family members (Baker & Tippin, 1997; Breheny & Stephens, 2009; Hodgetts et al., 2016; Lister, 2004; Rafferty & Wiggins, 2011; Rogers-Dillon, 1995). Applying structural analyses to issues such as welfare engagement and poverty, assists those concerned with social justice to address the root causes of oppressive life circumstances that go beyond downstream individual pathologising and blame (Hodgetts et al., 2016; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Riemer et al., 2020; Rimke, 2016).

Sole mothers and welfare

Multiple and complex systems of gendered power arrangements have long worked to position women as a subjugated group (Hunnicut, 2009; Lister, 2004; Waring, 1990). Patriarchy is one such system, that has positioned men as superior and dominant over women and children, who are positioned as inferior and subordinate (Hunnicut, 2009; Waring, 1990). Historically, women have been excluded in relation to property, voting, parental, and reproductive rights (Waring, 1990). As demonstrated above, in regard to welfare provision in Aotearoa/New Zealand, women were actively excluded from early governmental policies. Where many policies have become more inclusive, socioeconomic-political constructions of women, and their perceived value, have persisted, becoming embedded in many Anglo-Saxon majority cultures (Hunnicut, 2009). Although some mechanisms of patriarchy have become less overt in recent decades, many structural factors persist such as gender pay gaps, the feminisation of poverty, high numbers of women in low wage jobs, high rates of male against female violence and sexual violence, and the objectified representation of women in media (Hunnicut, 2009; Lister, 2004; Waring, 1990). Of note, social science scholars have claimed that structural violence can play out in the interactions between case managers and sole mothers in ways that mirror abuse within domestic relationships (Hodgetts et al., 2013; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). When engaging with WINZ and case managers, welfare recipients

have reported experiencing surveillance, threats, power and control, blame, mistreatment, denial of essential resources, and acquiescence (Hodgetts et al., 2013; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). These tactics align with many of the power and control tactics utilised by abusers to enact violence within domestic relationships (Robertson et al., 2007).

In patriarchal cultures, parenting persists as being viewed as women's work (Lister, 2004; Waring, 1990). Many mother's live busy lives and now carry what is referred to as the double burden. Feminist and economist, Marilyn Waring (1990, 2018), discusses the women's double burden of entering the paid work force while still carrying out the majority of the family domestic roles. While mothering and motherhood are not problematic in themselves, the ascribed social constructions enveloping them are. The devalued position of women is also recognisable in the devaluing of motherhood and mothering. Due to the prioritisation of free market economies, neoliberal ideals work in unison with patriarchy to further undermine the value of mothering. Under a patriarchal lens her domestic work can be considered as an extension of herself and therefore naturally hers (Lister, 2004; Waring, 1990). While, under a neoliberal lens, her domestic work is considered unproductive and devalued as it is not considered to be contributing to the economic system (Gray, 2019; Waring, 1990). Conversely, Waring (1990, 2018), argues that unpaid 'women's work' has helped underpin economic production and successes for centuries. For many sole mothers requiring welfare, engaging in the paid workforce can be complicated and constrained (Lister, 2004). For sole mothers, familial care and financial responsibility are not shared with a partner and therefore are time consuming and demanding aspects of everyday life (Lister, 2004).

For mothers, engaging with welfare is often due to transitional life disruptions and can result from job loss, the ending of a relationship, leaving violent home situations, becoming a mother, illness, or injury (Robertson et al., 2007; Rogers-Dillon, 1995). Difficult or traumatic

life upheavals can have significant and long term negative effects for sole mothers (Walker & Krägeloh, 2016). However, research suggests that following their life upheavals, the added layers of stress and distress associated with welfare engagement, impedes sole mothers' recovery and opportunities to thrive (Walker & Krägeloh, 2016). An aspect of this distress can be attributed to the negative stereotypes assigned to this socio-politically delegitimised group (Breheny & Stephens, 2009; Masters, Lindhorst, & Meyers, 2014). Along with the labels routinely attached to welfare beneficiaries of lazy, unmotivated, fraudulent, incapable, and scrounging, sole mothers are also subjected to further labels such as immoral, promiscuous, bad parents, and being accused of having children to receive welfare assistance (Baker & Tippin, 2002; Breheny & Stephens, 2009; Davis & Hagen, 1996; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Masters et al., 2014). Discrimination can be further compounded for mothers who inhabit multiple, marginalised identities and social locations. Intersecting locations such as race, ethnicity, age, and ability can bring about added layers of oppression (Anglin, 1998; Hulko, 2009).

Research demonstrates that sole mothering within the context of welfare is demanding, requiring much sacrifice on the part of mothers in order to provide for their families (Jackson & Graham, 2017). However, sole mothers are often subject to moral questioning and judgement that is not ascribed to mothers who are not engaged with the welfare system (Gillies, 2008; Pollack & Caragata, 2010; Rogers-Dillon, 1995). Whereby, sole mothers must navigate social contradictions of 'natural motherhood' and 'dependant beneficiary' (Lightman et al., 2005). Morally-bound social constructions of the 'undeserving' mother, contribute to the lived experiences of hardship and stigmatisation of this heterogeneous group (Breheny & Stephens, 2009; Davis & Hagen, 1996; Masters et al., 2014; Walker & Krägeloh, 2016).

Due to economic prioritisation, sole mothers are often pushed into low wage caregiving jobs and yet are not supported to be stay-at-home carers for their own children (Lightman et al., 2005; Campbell, 2016). The neoliberal driven privatisation of childcare, and subsequent promotion of, has also contributed to the decrease in availability of spaces of social solidarity and community care for parents and children, for example, by undermining community run programmes such as Playcentre's (Timmins, 2019). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Playcentre's are community based early childhood learning spaces, where the learning and relationship building between parent and child is valued and is done so within a collective environment alongside other parents and children (Timmins, 2019). Timmins (2019) describes this collective approach as 'alloparenting', which posits that the care for parent and child is a group effort to ensure the welfare and wellbeing for all. The concept of 'alloparenting' bears similar connotations to those of Māori whānau and whāngai practices (see *Participant engagements*).

Regarding sole mothers, discrediting and dehumanising narratives work to maintain unfounded hegemonic explanations of individual responsibility and blame, while eroding social solidarity. Which paradoxically, is a structural mechanism of oppression itself.

Chapter summary

Structural violence is created, implemented, and maintained through human decision-making within each ecological sphere of society, therefore it is avoidable and transformable (Anglin, 1998; Parsons, 2007). Where, micro-exchanges of structural violence can occur and work to maintain the status quo, it is the overarching structural systems that require transformation (Anglin, 1998; Dutta et al., 2016; Lee, 2016; Parsons, 2007). Addressing the macro causes of the current punitive welfare system can assist in the unravelling of adverse circumstances that play out within each of the encompassed ecological levels of people's everyday lives (see *Ecological perspectives*) (Crothers & Fletcher, 2015; Nelson &

Prilleltensky, 2010). Therefore, understanding and exploring the multiplexes of structural violence within the welfare system can allow for the deconstruction of oppressive factors and can facilitate the re-creation of systems that foster human flourishing (Crothers & Fletcher, 2015; Hodgetts et al., 2016).

Having offered the wider socioeconomic-political context that the current research is situated within, the following chapter demonstrates the methods and methodology used to achieve the research aim of exploring the lived experiences of sole mothers accessing support from the Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare agency Work and Income New Zealand.

Chapter Two: Methods

Introduction

“Methodology is about how to find things out, how to gain knowledge” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, as cited in, Cram, 2017, p. 9). Within the present chapter, I discuss the methodologies and methods utilised throughout the research process to gain knowledge to achieve the research outcomes of exploring sole mothers’ experiences of accessing support from the Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare agency Work and Income New Zealand. Firstly, as the underpinning values governing my practice, I state the ethical commitments that I am required, and choose, to uphold and value. I then consider the nature of knowledge within the epistemological paradigm of social constructionism. Further to this, I detail the underpinning research theoretical perspectives, including the overarching perspective of community psychology, and of particular relevance to this study I expand on concepts of ecological perspectives, diversity, and social justice.

The use of case study and semi-structured interviews are then justified as effective relationship-centred knowledge inquiry tools for the purposes of this research. Following on I discuss my engagements with participants, including introducing participants Lucy and Rose, and discussing our interview engagements and interview procedures. Lastly, I detail the interpretive analysis approaches and their relevance to the research study. Aspects of narrative, phenomenological, feminist and intersectionality approaches, and the appropriate use of aspects of Kaupapa Māori research are considered.

Ethical Commitments

As the researcher of this project, I am committed to ensuring I conduct myself and my work with integrity and to a high ethical standard to protect the integrity of the research and most importantly to protect the human rights and dignity of the collaborating participants. I am directly accountable to the University of Waikato Psychology Research and Ethics

Committee, to my supervisor Dr Otilie Stolte, as well as to myself and to the participants collaborating on this project.

This research project was granted ethical approval on the 28th of June 2018 (Appendix 1), which requires the research to be conducted in a manner that adheres to the ethical standards set out by the University of Waikato Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities regulations. My practice and decision making has also been guided by the four overarching principles as set out in the New Zealand Psychologists' Code of Ethics, of "*1. Respect for the dignity of persons and peoples; 2. Responsible caring; 3. Integrity of relationships; 4. Social justice and responsibility to society*" (New Zealand Psychological Society [NZPS], 2002, p. 2).

The current research project is situated within the Aotearoa/New Zealand context. I have a responsibility to recognise the cultural and historical contexts at play throughout the research process found within this context and within the contexts of people's lives (Estacio, 2012; L. T. Smith, 2012). Consequently, I have been guided by the principles of partnership, participation, and protection as set out in New Zealand's founding document The Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi (ToW) (for further information on the ToW see <https://nzhistory.govt.nz>). Furthermore, Māori, the indigenous peoples of New Zealand have been routinely mistreated and misrepresented where research has been concerned (L. T. Smith, 2012). Therefore, to protect against discrimination and harm, practising psychologists within Aotearoa/New Zealand must accept that the ToW establishes the foundation of respect between Māori and non-Māori in our nation (NZPS, 2002). Adhering to the above codes and guidelines have been the underpinning of my engagements with both Māori and non-Māori persons and organisations.

The ToW principle of partnership was realised through partnering with local community groups who assisted the research with participant recruitment and Māori cultural

guidance (discussed further in *Participant recruitment* and *Participant engagements*).

Additionally, partnership was enacted by placing the relationships I built with participants and partnering local community groups at the forefront of the project. In other words, I took the view that the women who shared their stories are co-collaborators in the research (Nelson, Prilleltensky, & MacGillivray, 2001; L. T. Smith, 2012). As stated by Rappaport (2000), social science researchers cannot hope to achieve social change without purposefully and authentically collaborating with those most affected by the issue at hand. Participation has been implemented through recruiting and engaging with participants, who access Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ) services, to seek understandings of their lived experiences. Further participation included seeking feedback from participants regarding their interview transcripts, which provided them with the opportunity to further engage in the research process (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007).

As L. T. Smith (2012) argues, researchers need to reflect on the privilege that comes with receiving shared stories and knowledge from participants. With this privilege comes the responsibility to not perpetuate harm (L. T. Smith, 2012; Teo, 2010). Thus, I have been committed to not only protecting each person's information and confidentiality, but also to do all that I could to protect the wellbeing of each woman and her shared knowledge by treating them with respect, dignity, and compassion. In accordance with the ToW and as reflected in the NZPS (2002) ethics, the principle of protection was also implemented through seeking appropriate Māori guidance on Māori cultural sensitivity and awareness (discussed further in *Participant recruitment* and *Participant engagements*). As a Pākehā (New Zealander of European descent) researcher with Pākehā cultural understandings, working alongside Māori participants, I had a commitment and a duty to adopt Māori culturally sensitive practices (NZPS, 2002; L. T. Smith, 2012). The cultural guidance I received facilitated a meaningful embedding of appropriate tikanga Māori (correct Māori procedure and protocol) throughout

the project and ensured that a Māori worldview was considered in the analysis of the findings.

Reflecting my ethical positioning of fore fronting relationships and the wellbeing of participants is the valuing of their shared knowledge. Viewing the constructed knowledge of participants as valid and important, my epistemological underpinning throughout the research is that of social constructionism.

Social Constructionism

In seeking to understand the nature of knowledge, we can view knowledge creation perspectives as being on a continuum ranging from realism to relativism (Moon & Blackman, 2014). My approach in understanding knowledge creation lies somewhat in the middle of this continuum; whereby I argue that we can materially understand and observe that, for example, poverty exists, yet the way in which each of us may view, understand, and/or experience the phenomena of poverty can differ from group to group and person to person. That is, where the existence of some material phenomena is real, the ways in which we understand and interpret them, due to a multitude of interconnected factors, can subjectively differ (Gough, 2001). In research areas such as the present study, when gaining understandings into the aforementioned subjective differences, the guiding precept of social constructionism offers an effective epistemological underpinning.

The epistemological stance of social constructionism asserts that we can view the production and acquisition of knowledge as being constructed through interpretations and meaning making of social interactions and through interactions with the world around us (Crotty, 1998). Our own subjectivities and knowledge constructions are influenced by time, place, culture, and experience (Giddens & Sutton, 2013; Hodgetts et al., 2010). These contextual dimensions must be considered when seeking understandings of people's everyday lives, as it is in these 'spaces' that people and their knowledge are situated (Hodgetts et al.,

2010). In addition, sociologist Anthony Giddens (1982) offers the theory of *double involvement*, which suggests that, the person shapes and re-shapes the social and society, and the social and society shapes and re-shapes the person; therefore, one cannot be explored or understood without consideration of the other (Rappaport, 2000). Furthermore, knowledge construction is not static but can be viewed as a flux of actions, decisions, and interpretations (Giddens & Sutton, 2013).

The purpose in undertaking this research is to gain knowledge and understandings into the experiences of sole mothers accessing support from the New Zealand welfare agency Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ). Utilising a social constructionist approach in this effort helps to go beyond linear, and possibly preconceived, ideas of the everyday lived experience for these women and their families. Furthermore, a social constructionist underpinning, that is to understand participants experiences as a multi-faceted amalgamation of phenomena, we can better understand the impact of macro level forces on the everyday lives of those accessing support from the welfare system (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017).

With more broad understandings we can work to construct an alternative representation of those having first-hand experience of the welfare system (Cullen & Hodgetts, 2001). This reflects the need to move away from the mainstream accounts that vilify and pathologise the individual and ignore the broader forces at play (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). Understanding how structural forces impact the everyday lives of those accessing support from welfare agencies is important. Such understandings can then underpin actions at a structural level to ensure people in the welfare system can live lives of full participation, economic security, dignity, and human flourishing (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Hodgetts, Stolte, King, & Groot, 2019).

A social constructionist positioning posits that people construct personal and collective knowledge through a lifetime of multi-layered social and phenomenological

interactions. To assist in understanding the complexity and interconnectedness of multi-layered construction contexts, and the impacts of, I have employed the theoretical perspectives offered within community psychology. Of particular significance to the present study are the perspectives of ecological, diversity, and social justice approaches.

Theoretical Perspectives

Community psychology

The current research is a fulfilment requirement for the degree Master of Applied Community Psychology, and therefore, community psychology principles and values underpin the approach taken. Prilleltensky (2001) argues that our values are always implicated in how we select issues and outcomes in the course of the research process. My interest and passion in pursuing a degree in the field of community psychology stems from my own values and principles that align with the values and principles of the field. In particular, regarding the current research, the principles of ecological perspectives, diversity, social justice, collaboration, and empathy and compassion have guided my practice and analysis (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Further to this list, I also subscribe to the action oriented approach that many community and social psychologists undertake when working to advance positive change regarding social and social justice issues (Nelson, 2013; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

Community psychology (CP) is a broad sub-discipline of psychology. Utilising interdisciplinary approaches, community psychology draws on various forms of knowledge and academic and experiential expertise, allowing for diversification and expansion of perspectives when seeking understandings and transformations regarding social problems (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Riemer et al., 2020). Accordingly, community psychologists engage with scholars across multiple and varied fields, such as sociology, anthropology, and geography. In addition, community psychologists also engage with the people who are most

directly impacted by the social systems that they seek to change. A key objective is to extend beyond the dominant psychological understandings of individual deficits of people and groups (Rimke, 2016). Instead, those working within a CP paradigm promote and value in-group member collaboration, working alongside those who have been unfairly oppressed and marginalised by broad systems (Hodgetts et al., 2016; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

The theoretical perspective of CP provides a clear framework to guide the current research, that being, the experiences of sole mothers accessing support from the Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare agency Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ). Qualitatively collaborating with women who have had first-hand experience of accessing support from WINZ lends to gaining experiential knowledges and understandings unique to that of a first-person perspective (Frost & Ouellette, 2011). With such shared knowledge, community psychologists can better understand how WINZ, and the underpinning ideologies embedded within WINZ culture and policies, reproduces hardship and poverty for these mothers and their families (Hodgetts et al., 2019).

The purpose of gaining first-person narratives is not simply an exercise of knowledge collection for the sake of knowledge collection (Frost & Ouellette, 2011; Prilleltensky, 2001). Exploring how participants attribute and construct meaning making concerning their experiences with WINZ, opens the door to understanding the complex ways in which unjust social systems impact people's everyday lives (Moane, 2003). Additionally, by interpreting narratives relating to sole parents' experiences of welfare we can understand how oppressive systems 'get under the skin' and undermine wellbeing (Hodgetts et al., 2019). Demonstrating the structural and societal origins of the suffering experienced by sole parents provides an alternative to perpetuating the unjust status quo that currently maintains the individualised and deficit focused behavioural conditionality ascribed to these women (Hodgetts et al., 2017; Standing, 2011).

In highlighting more in-depth understandings of sole parents' lived experiences is an attempt to promote *empathetic generalisation* (Hodgetts et al., 2019). In CP, the objective is not necessarily to generalise experience across populations. Instead, empathetic generalisation is a theoretical notion with the potential to generate insights between, for example, more affluent people who do not need to rely on welfare and sole parents who do. The goal is to build common ground with participants and their stories, evoking compassion as well as contemplation regarding ideas of inequity and unfairness (Hodgetts et al., 2019). This process can narrow the social divide between groups, which is an essential first step for reimagining a welfare system underpinned by rights, solidarity, full citizenship, care, and collective responsibility (Hodgetts et al., 2019). Through utilising empathetic generalisation processes, an aim of this research is to promote social solidarity by offering a contextual alternative narrative to the current normative framing that places individual blame onto sole parents who need to access WINZ benefits (Nelson, 2013). Ecological perspectives are effective tools in analysing and demonstrating the context-bound experiences of everyday life.

Ecological perspectives

Traditionally, in mainstream psychology, there has been a penchant to perform research on or about 'subjects', which has often led to findings that have pathologized individuals and/or groups (Rimke, 2016; Teo, 2009). Such research approaches tend to ignore the broader social and societal level factors that impact the everyday lives of those being pathologized. In contrast, a core principle of CP is the ecological perspective, which considers the differing levels of society to explore how systems and people within the levels are interlinked, and how these interconnections shape everyday life and experience (Hodgetts et al., 2010; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). The ecological model shown below (see Figure. 1), demonstrates the nested levels of society, from personal and micro through to macro level

structures. Between and within each level there is continuous and ever-evolving relationship and interconnectedness (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

From micro to macro levels, we can understand our lives as being interconnected with people and systems that we directly interact with, as well as with people and systems we may never tangibly or consciously experience. Thinking in terms of everyday experience, ecological levels and processes can be overt, covert, consciously or unconsciously observed, and/or taken-for-granted. That is, when going about our everyday life we may or may not be aware of how ecological factors impact our lives, the lives of others, and society as a whole (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Due to the interconnected nature of our being, critically examining the impacts and interconnections of micro to macro level factors is necessary to grasp a holistic view of circumstance. Not doing so hinders our understanding of the bigger picture at play and means we may fail to take effective action to improve human and societal wellbeing (Moane, 2003).

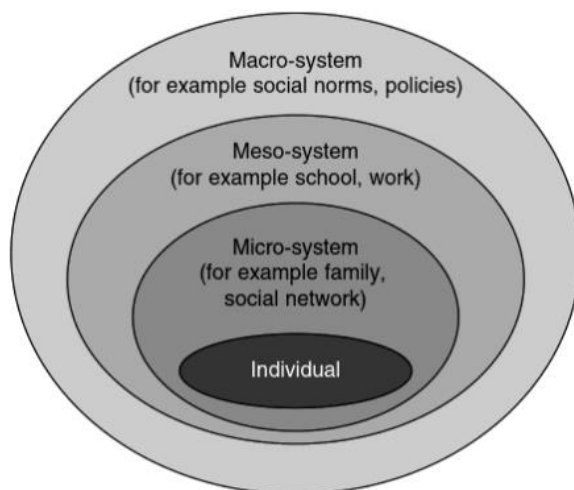


Figure 1. Nested ecological levels of analysis (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010, p. 78)

Utilising an ecological model, such as that seen in Figure 1, makes it possible to situate people within the context in which they live their lives offering a broader view that goes beyond individual pathology and blame (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). If we consider, for example, a sole mother accessing support from WINZ we can explore areas of social and

structural systems that play out privately and intimately within her life and that of her family. At a personal level, a sole mother has her own identity, culture, age, ethnicity, health status, physical ability, sexual orientation, and income, to consider. At a micro-system analysis, for example, we might consider a sole mother's access to supportive friend, family, and/or faith-based networks, her address and access to food stores and public transport. At the meso level, factors to consider include, access to schools and childcare facilities, school curriculums, as well as the availability of suitable sustainable employment (Lightman et al., 2005; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

The macro system is the overarching level that encompasses and influences each other level nested within it. The micro, meso, exo and chrono (see below) are direct manifestations of implicit and explicit macro structural patterns (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Involved within the macro system level are culture, norms, ideologies, as well as political, economic, and legal systems. Critiquing the macro system, in this research example, may involve exploring societal attitudes and expectations towards sole mother beneficiaries as well as looking at the governing political ideologies, legislation, and policy that have material, social and psychological effects on these women and their children. For example, in the context of neoliberalism, a WINZ policy created by the Ministry of Social Development may apply strict obligations that a sole mother must abide by to avoid losing her income. Policies such as these are often created by political elites who have no experiential knowledge of the systems that which they govern, perpetuating unequal representation and power (Prilleltensky, 2001); while placing the burden of hardship on those disadvantaged by such policies (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Policies created at a structural level are often guided by macro level ideologies, which become embodied and felt within the personal and micro level living experience (Frost & Ouellette, 2011; Hodgetts et al., 2019). Thus, the political becomes personal.

In addition to the ecological model as demonstrated by Nelson and Prilleltensky (2010), Bronfenbrenner offers two further levels of analysis, the exosystem (1977) and the chronosystem (1986). As mentioned above, people may not directly engage with particular system aspects, but these can still have impact on their lives, this is referred to as the exosystem setting. A chronosystems model level reflects the changes over time over all levels from personal and micro through to macro level histories and changes (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Although a sole parent may not purposefully engage in politics or policy, they will most definitely be affected by political shifts and welfare policy outcomes. Regarding the chronosystem, those engaging with WINZ will often do so due to transitional periods in their lives, such as during periods of unemployment, ill health, or relationship breakdown. Additionally, macro structures such as social welfare system policies have changed over time (Cheyne et al., 2008). Paying attention to and analysing how these histories and changes impact sole mothers receiving assistance provides further important contextualisation.

The examples discussed in this section do not reflect the full range of factors that are played out within the lives of sole mother beneficiaries. However, these examples do indicate that utilising an ecological perspective is important in understanding the complexity of personal and social system interactions taking place within the everyday lives of sole mothers.

Diversity

Although the concept of diversity has been a fundamental principle in community psychology for decades, the praxis applied to the diversity concept has been somewhat lacking in the field over the years (Trickett, 1994). Nonetheless, valuing the core principle of diversity has been applied throughout the current research. Within CP, diversity involves the inclusion of diverse knowledges, cultural diversity, interdisciplinary involvement, as well as methodological diversity. The aforementioned ecological perspective is an effective tool

which enables us to explore the diversity in people's lives, including the diversity of contexts (Trickett, 1996). Hence, the principle of diversity is closely linked to that of ecological perspectives. When applied to the current research diversity involves the inclusion of experiential narratives, of acknowledging and valuing cultural diversity as it applies within Aotearoa/New Zealand context, and to methodological diversification.

Often those in marginalised groups are left out of discussions when matters regarding them are being discussed (Lister, 2004). People and groups in socially vulnerable positions are “*rendered inaudible*” and are routinely ignored ((Prilleltensky, 2001, p. 761).

Consequently, social attitudes and policies are constructed and created without meaningful inclusion of those most greatly affected by them (Lister, 2007; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). This silencing of marginalized people perpetuates the socio-political status quo and preserves often negative homogenising stereotypes (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Shildrick & MacDonald, 2013). In seeking understandings from sole mothers accessing support from WINZ, it is essential then to include their experiences and knowledge (Rappaport, 2000). Through engagement with those persons with first-hand knowledge of adverse structures we can co-create alternative narratives to counter those of the often ideologically based hegemonic narratives created by the political, economic, and academic ‘elite’ (Angelique & Mulvey, 2012; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

Within the Aotearoa/New Zealand Psychologists Code of Ethics and pertaining to the current research, the principle of diversity includes the “*respect for the dignity of persons and peoples requir[ing] that each person and all peoples are positively valued in their own right*” (The New Zealand Psychological Society, 2012, p. 4). Accordingly, all psychologists must ensure respect and dignity for diverse personal/group social locations and world views. Intersections of social locations can include aspects such as gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, religious or faith beliefs, sexual orientation, and so forth

(Hulko, 2009); each of which contributes to the personal identity, socialisation, and world view of persons. Regarding respect and dignity for people/s, and of particular consequence within the Aotearoa/New Zealand context, is the relationship between Māori and non-Māori persons. Typically, regarding research (as well as in other settings), Māori people, Māori knowledge, and Māori world views have traditionally been excluded and/or negatively misrepresented (L. T. Smith, 2012).

Statistically, Māori women are disproportionality more represented regarding receipt of Sole Parent Support through WINZ (Ministry of Social Development, 2020). However, alongside multiple structural explanations for this statistical representation, some indigenous researchers posit that Pākehā (non-Māori New Zealander) informed neoliberal constructions of ‘equal opportunity’ and meritocracy ignore issues of systemic racism (Pack, Tuffin, & Lyons, 2016). In turn, Māori sole mothers are held individually accountable when viewed as ‘failing’ within Pākehā formulated ‘egalitarian’ structures (Pack et al., 2016). Therefore, research that seeks to make visible and transform the causes of social structure injustice may be of benefit and importance to Māori communities (Cram, 2017). Additionally, both participants contributing to this research identify as Māori. As a researcher, I have a duty of care and responsibility to subvert the damaging practices, such as those stated above (L. T. Smith, 2012). Furthermore, to enact this as a Pākehā researcher, I must consider culturally and structurally situated differences between Pākehā and Māori world views throughout participant engagements and research analysis (Cram, Pipi, & Paipa, 2018). To facilitate this responsibility, I have utilised aspects of Kaupapa Māori approaches, alongside other methodological approaches.

A Kaupapa Māori approach is “*for Māori, by Māori, with Māori*” (Cram et al., 2018, p. 64), therefore, as a non-Māori researcher I cannot assume to fully appreciate or apply this particular approach. However, I have applied aspects of the approach such as manaakitanga

(respect, care), reciprocity, collaboration, and whanaungatanga (relationship), and have considered te ao Māori (the Māori world) and Māori worldviews in my practice and analysis (Cram, 1997). Although the scope of the project does not allow for a detailed written exploration, considering systemic processes of historic and current colonisation, assist in understanding the complexities of people's lives and of levels of oppression (Cram, 2017). Importantly, applying diverse methodologies, approaches and aspects should in the first instance work to serve both, the participants, and the research. Applying research frameworks that value and respect diversity and that also challenge oppressive social institutions affecting everyday life are relevant to the principle of social justice.

Social justice

Within the field of community psychology social justice is not only a core value, but also a lens through which to critically view social issues (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Prilleltensky, 2012). Relevant to CP, social justice has been explained as *“The fair and equitable allocation of bargaining powers, resources, and obligations in society in consideration of people's differential power, needs, and abilities to express wishes”* (Riemer et al., 2020, p. 58). For CP, social justice is tied to the aspiration and action toward ending unfair inequities and oppression (Prilleltensky, 2012; Riemer et al., 2020). Psychologists, Prilleltensky and Gonick (1996, pp. 129-130), provide the following definition:

Oppression entails a state of asymmetric power relations characterized by domination, subordination, and resistance, where the dominating person or groups exercise their power by implanting in the subordinated persons or groups fear or self-deprecating views about themselves.

Without pursuing social justice, many marginalised people who have been relegated to groups suffering oppression and marginalisation, are left without fair and equitable access to resources. Such unfair circumstances compromise and constrain the pursuit of wellbeing (Prilleltensky, 2012; Riemer et al., 2020).

Power dynamics are a central aspect of social justice analysis. Gramsci's (1972) concept of hegemony asserts that dominance and power imbalances often go unchallenged. As a result, the ideologies of the powerful become normative, embedded in discourse and attitude, both explicitly and implicitly (Gramsci, 1972, as cited in, Hunnicutt, 2009). Considering that much of system underpinnings and policy-making is ideologically based, it is necessary to challenge dominant hegemonic structures that maintain oppression and structural violence (see *Chapter One*) (Dutta et al., 2016; Nelson, 2013). Moreover, issues regarding oppression and marginalisation are inherently political (Hodgetts, Stolte, & Groot, 2014; Prilleltensky, 2008). Leading community psychologists have argued that there has been a lack of political engagement in CP in attending to issues of politics and policy (Nelson, 2013; Prilleltensky, 2008). Yet, to pursue social justice CP must be active in this arena (Hodgetts, Stolte, & Rua, (Prilleltensky, 2003; Teo, 2009). Aotearoa/New Zealand has for the last few decades been governed, politically and socially, by neoliberal ideologies (see *Chapter One*) (Cheyne et al., 2008). Whereby, neoliberalism has become so ingrained within society and structures that it has largely become normative, taken-for-granted, and therefore largely unquestioned (Harvey, 2007).

The current Aotearoa/New Zealand social welfare agency Work and Income (WINZ) is underpinned by neoliberal principles of personal responsibility, minimal government involvement, free-market thinking as well as erroneous perceptions of meritocracy (Bullock & Reppond, 2018). Neoliberal principles have also shaped the beliefs and actions of welfare agency staff and the wider public about the clients who need to engage with the service for assistance (Breheny & Stephens, 2009; Hodgetts et al., 2013; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). Beliefs of personal responsibility and meritocracy position those who require assistance as being lazy, immoral, and of lacking ambition who would otherwise 'achieve' though for lack of motivation (Standing, 2011). Consequently, positioning welfare recipients as 'less than' is

an act of subordination, creating personal and group oppression (Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996). Some social psychologists (Dutta et al., 2016; Hodgetts et al., 2013) have employed the notion of structural violence (see *Chapter One*) to explain the routine practices occurring within WINZ offices and how the current welfare policies and practices harm those who rely on such assistance to survive.

The values of those in positions of power tend to maintain the status quo, while those with limited access to power are more likely to voice values that endorse change (Lord & Hutchison, 2007, as cited in Riemer et al., 2020). Community orientated scholars and advocates working to facilitate meaningful social change and justice cannot do so without collaborating with those who are positioned within the oppressed and marginalised groups (Nelson et al., 2001; Rappaport, 2000). Through case study interviewing, working alongside the women who have experienced the WINZ system assisted in gaining more rich, deep understandings into how socio-political systems impact on the everyday lives of those who struggle within them. By valuing the collaboration and contribution of participants who are unfairly marginalised by structural systems, community psychologists can facilitate social change and justice (Hodgetts et al., 2016).

Case Studies and Semi-Structured Interviews

This research has been undertaken within a qualitative paradigm to provide in-depth insightful accounts of the issues in question. Some qualitative research methods within psychology, including case studies, have been challenged as producing ‘invalid’ knowledge (Frost & Ouellette, 2011; Rimke, 2016). In recent history, much of psychology has aligned itself with scientific models of study, where human behaviour and psychological distress are reduced to variables, and where ‘universal truths’ and generalisability are sought (Rimke, 2016; Yilmaz, 2013). Whilst such research practices have importance, many psychologists argue that too much emphasis has been given to quantitative deductive methods, particularly

in areas where qualitative methods of inquiry would be beneficial (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012; Polkinghorne, 2007; Rimke, 2016). Qualitative research approaches are relevant when the interest is in gaining rich insights and understandings regarding social phenomena from those with first-person knowledge and experience. With first-person constructions, it is then possible, with the use of interpretive tools, to explore the complexity and interconnectivity of social worlds and phenomena (Thomas, 2010; Yilmaz, 2013).

Of note, qualitative inquiry practices are heterogeneous and adopt many differing methods across many different disciplines (Brinkmann, 2015; Yilmaz, 2013). Nonetheless, for the purposes of this study, consistent with the research aims and with a narrative social constructionist approach, I chose to employ the qualitative method of case study research to achieve an in-depth inquiry. Often where qualitative experiential practices are discussed, sample size has come into question regarding validity of knowledge claims and generalisability (Boddy, 2016; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). However, many social scientists refute this claim, and the desire for population generalisability, and instead argue for more inclusion of such knowledge creation approaches, further still, advocating for the validity of even single-case accounts (Boddy, 2016; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012; Stolte & Hodgetts, 2013). Case study approaches allow for in-depth accounts from a range of perspectives that may otherwise be absent from discussions of how to address and promote wellbeing meaningfully (Teo, 2015). In this study, implementing a case study approach allowed for a deeper engagement with sole mothers' accounts regarding their experiences of accessing support from Work and Income New Zealand.

In this research, I collaborated with two case study participants, Lucy and Rose (pseudonyms). Both Lucy and Rose chose their own pseudonyms. Lucy is a sole mother of three children and came to engage with the welfare system after the relationship with the father of her children had ended. Rose is a sole mother of four, who at the time of our

engagements had two school-aged children at home, with her two adult children living elsewhere. Additionally, at this time Rose also had another school-aged child in her care. Rose spoke to me from her position as a social worker and advocate, as well as having had personally engaged with WINZ in the past (for further details about Lucy and Rose see *Participant engagements*). The participants and I engaged in semi-structured interviews, where I presented guiding questions, but we were flexible in taking the conversation in directions that were of importance to Lucy and Rose (Chamberlain, Cain, Sheridan, & Dupuis, 2011; Flick, 2014). Prior to the audio-recorded interviews taking place, I met separately with Lucy and Rose to meet face-to-face (kanohi ki te kanohi) and for us to get to know one another (whanaungatanga).

Creating relationships with participants in the course of case study research demonstrates value for their personhood and allows for the building of rapport, fostering safe ‘spaces’ for them to share their private knowledge (Estacio, 2012; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). When considering and interpreting participant contributions it is essential to recognise each of their own particular contexts, micro (for example, meeting WINZ obligations, familial situation, and personal history) to macro (for example, neoliberal social structures, culture, and history), and how these are interconnected within their experiences and meaning making constructions. Each participant shared feelings and stories that differed from the others, but similar accounts of experience were also shared.

Participant recruitment

I currently reside and study in Tauranga Moana, Aotearoa/New Zealand. Due to the emphasis in this research on partnership, compassion and building rapport with participants it made the most sense to draw on my knowledge of the local context and existing community networks in my choice of setting for the present study. I began volunteering at the Tauranga Community Foodbank two years ago as a way of contributing to my local community and

assisting people facing hardship. My time at the food bank has helped to ground my thinking regarding issues that are relevant to the present study. Furthermore, my interactions with clients and fellow staff have expanded my life experience, fostering greater empathy and compassion for diverse life experiences, and has provided opportunities for the actioning of my values. To recruit participants, I reached out to Suzy (pseudonym), a woman I had met through my voluntary work at the local food bank who herself worked at a local community centre. This community centre provides services such as counselling, budgeting advice, and youth and after school drop-in services.

I thought it appropriate to make first contact with Suzy about the research project by telephone. This decision was made, as I did not want to approach Suzy unannounced at her place of work given that I was approaching the community centre as a potential site for recruitment. During our phone conversation, I explained the purpose of the research and what the community centre's involvement might look like. Suzy expressed her support for the research and that, in her experience, there certainly would be women that would likely be keen to participate in this project accessing the community centre services. The benefit of partnering with a local organisation is that the women using this service may have long standing relationships with the centre (Estacio, 2012). For potential participants, having a standing relationship with a recruitment representative may foster a level of comfort to engage in research. Already having an established person-to-person connection was considered more likely to lead to recruitment, rather than relying on people to respond to a research flyer on a noticeboard (Estacio, 2012). I offered to come to the centre in person to discuss the research with staff and to facilitate whakawhanaungatanga (process of establishing relationships). However, Suzy expressed that they were under a lot of time pressure with other projects so we would continue to communicate via phone and email. I followed her lead, understanding and respecting these communication preferences.

Once the community centre manager had given approval for me to proceed with the recruitment process at their premises, I arranged an appropriate time to visit the centre in person to deliver the Participant Information Sheets (Appendix 2) and Consent Forms (Appendix 3). Upon my visit, Suzy and I had a conversation about the research and about her work. In the course of this conversation, I was able to thank her, and the other staff present, for their willingness to support the research project via the recruitment process. The centre allowed me to leave participant information sheets and consent forms on their reception counter for anyone interested to take home to read. The information sheets contained my contact details, whereby, interested people could then email or phone me directly to express their interest or ask further questions. The above approach allowed potential participants to gain knowledge about the research as well providing time away from others to consider their participation. Unfortunately, this avenue of recruitment did not yield any inquiries or participants. However, another unanticipated recruitment opportunity presented itself organically during the research process.

Prior to the recruitment process, I sought Māori cultural support and guidance from an appropriate University of Waikato staff member, Mārie (pseudonym). This was an important first step, due to my positionality as a Pākehā researcher, who has predominantly been socialised within a Pākehā culture, and due to the high likelihood of engaging with participants who identify as Māori. Mārie was reassured by my research approach, and subsequently decided to connect me with a community psychologist, April (pseudonym), working within a local iwi (extended kinship group, tribe) organisation who could possibly provide further Māori cultural support. The personal connections outlined here, demonstrate the value of whanaungatanga (relationship) when working with a participatory approach. Utilising a person-centred approach alongside prioritising rapport building can foster more meaningful connections (Pe-Pua, 1989; Prilleltensky, 2003). In this context, the commitments

I had made to working in a collaborative manner fostered the building of trust with Mārie, which in turn led to the opportunity to build further connections. The community psychologist, April, and I communicated via email and arranged a time to meet in person. April and I arranged to meet at a café convenient to her workplace where we could share kai (food and drink) and whakawhanaungatanga (process of establishing relationships) in an informal setting. Accompanying April was a colleague of hers, Rose (pseudonym), who worked at the same organisation as a social worker and advocate. After introducing myself to April and Rose, due to my nerves and to my Pākehā world view of not wanting to take up too much of their time, I attempted to jump quickly into ‘business’ talk (Black, 2010). However, with care, April and Rose quickly redirected the conversation to whakawhanaungatanga, which I appreciated. Therefore, prior to discussing culturally sensitive research practices, the three of us first took the time to get to know each other and build trust and rapport. So, to start, we spent time engaging personally, by sharing stories, ideas, laughs, and concerns (whakawhanaungatanga).

Once rapport had been established, I was able to introduce the research topic and related issues. At this point, the two women I was meeting with shared that they supported the kaupapa (topic, purpose, proposal) of the current research. To support this kaupapa, April and Rose expressed that they were keen to assist in the recruitment process. I was humbled by their support and generosity, as I had not requested their involvement in the recruitment process. Nelson et al. (2001) assert that a core aspect of building authentic relationships in research settings is the establishment and growth of shared values between parties. The willingness of the women to become further involved in the project not only demonstrated our sharing of values and the value of building rapport but also to the need for flexibility in this type of research. During our time together, April and Rose offered me practical guidance to engage with Māori authentically and appropriately as well as a window into kaupapa

Māori (Māori approaches and principles) and te ao Māori (the Māori world). The specific guidance that was offered and the relevant praxis of such is discussed further in *Participant engagements*.

Following the initial meeting, Rose and I stayed in touch arranging to meet again in person to discuss participant recruitment. We met at Rose's place of work at the Iwi organisation building. As I was a manuhiri (guest) at the premises, I followed tikanga (correct procedure, custom or practice) and brought along kai (food) to share and as a koha (gift, gesture of reciprocity) for her time. My host offered me manaakitanga (hospitality, generosity) with welcoming me there as well as offering me a hot drink and/or water. Rose, the social worker, had compiled a list of women who met the criteria for the research agenda. Rose had already contacted each of the women regarding the research and had gained their consent for their contact details to be passed on to me.

Later that day, I contacted each of the women on Rose's list by cell phone, resulting in mixed responses. With the women whose calls went through to voice mail I left a message detailing who I was, my connection to Rose, the reason for my calling, and that I would contact them again on a particular day. My reasoning for not asking them to contact me back was that any costs for calls were my responsibility. I also stated a day and approximate time of day i.e., afternoon, to call back to offer respect of their time by giving notice of my intention. With the women who did not answer my second call, I left a message for them to contact me if they were interested in discussing the research any further. I offered that they could text me and I would call them back, again to incur the costs myself. I did not pursue the participation of this group of women further beyond this to respect their privacy.

For the women who answered my phone calls, we discussed the research topic, their potential involvement, and I answered any questions they had. As discussed in our calls, I emailed each of these women a research Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 2) and

Consent Form (Appendix 3) to read over, and again provided the opportunity for any further questions to be raised and answered. Of this group of women, one, Lucy (pseudonym), chose to join the research project. Lucy and I engaged further and arranged a time for a kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) meeting before setting an interview conversation time.

During my earlier meeting with Rose, she had expressed interest in participating in the research as a participant herself. As I was unsure about what her participation meant regarding my ethics approval, I went away from the meeting to follow up on the possibility of her involvement. I was required to request an amendment to my ethics approval as my approval was for women currently engaging with the Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare system. Although Rose was engaging with the welfare service in a professional capacity, for and with her clients, she also had past personal experience as a sole mother accessing welfare support. During the ethics amendment process I kept Rose informed on all progress, offering her transparency, and respecting her position as a co-collaborator. The ethics amendment was granted approval (Appendix 4), and Rose joined the research project as a participant.

Participant engagements

Participants

As stated above, both Lucy and Rose have experienced engaging with the Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare agency Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ). At the time of her participation in the research, Lucy was a stay-at-home sole mother of three young children and was receiving a Sole Parent Support benefit through WINZ. Lucy identified herself as being of both Māori and European descent and was aged in the 20-30 year old bracket. Lucy engaged with WINZ after leaving an unhealthy relationship with the father of her children. Lucy discussed the continuing impacts of experiencing fear and intimidation from her ex-partner as well as the stress of ongoing custody issues and co-parenting with him. Lucy also spoke of the challenges regarding having a mother with significant mental health

issues and how this had affected her support systems and her own mental and emotional wellbeing.

At the time of our engagements, Rose was employed as a social worker and advocate at a local Tauranga Iwi organisation. To protect Rose's identity, I have chosen not to name the Iwi involved. Rose was aged in the 30-40 year old age bracket. Relevant to the current research, Rose routinely worked alongside precariat women and families assisting them in their engagements with WINZ. In the past, Rose had herself required assistance from WINZ as a sole mother of four children and as a university student. Throughout our conversations, Rose spoke often of the strength gained from her wider whānau, especially her tīpuna (ancestors, grandparents) and from the emotional support of her father. At the time of our interactions, Rose had two children under the age of 18 living at home with her. She also had two adult children living outside of her home. Additionally, a family friend under the age of 18 years was also living with Rose at the time of our interactions. This care-giving arrangement reflects the Māori practice known as whāngai.

Whāngai is a widely practiced whānau custom within te ao Māori (the Māori world). The literal English translation of whāngai means 'to feed or nourish', and usually takes place within the whānau (McRae & Nikora, 2006). The concept of whānau, family, within a Māori context differs to that of a traditional Pākehā or European context. The traditional European family model consists of the nuclear group with remaining family considered extended family. Whereas, Māori whānau encompasses the nuclear family as well as grandparents, aunties, uncles, cousins and beyond (Mead, 2016).

Unlike many Pākehā family groups, Māori whānau generally do not differentiate between say a first, second, or third cousin. Instead, in this example, all are simply cousins. In te ao Māori, the emphasis is more on generational stratification within the whānau, than on individual roles and titles. This reflects a tuakana/teina learning model. Cram (2017) offers a

simplified explanation of tuakana/teina, which states that the sharing of knowledge and learning between tuakana/older and teina/younger people/groups is a significant practice in te ao Māori (the Māori world). For a more in-depth explanation on tuakana/teina please see Oetzel et al. (2019). Traditionally, whānau is a collective concept, whereby all extended family members share in the responsibilities and care for each other (Mead, 2016; Newman, 2013). The tradition of whāngai is a long held practice that promotes the holistic nature of Māori whānau. Whereby, for a multitude of possible reasons, the day-to-day care and responsibility of a child is placed with someone other than the child's birth parents while remaining within the whānau and retaining connection. The informal agreement of whāngai may be short term, long term, or a permanent arrangement (McRae & Nikora, 2006).

When engaging in research it is important to recognise the context within which the researchers and the participants' knowledge is situated, constructed, and socialised. Regarding my engagements with Lucy and Rose, it is imperative that I consider how our potential differences, such as familial culture, contribute to our constructed meaning making, experience, and interpretation. Additionally, considering varying familial models within a particular societal context allows for the exploration of how such models are accounted for or ignored within welfare policies. Through engaging in conversations, we are able to value and gain greater understanding into diverse world views and another's life world experiences.

Interview engagements

The aim of the current research was to gain knowledge and understanding regarding the lived experiences of sole mothers accessing support from Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ). To facilitate the exploration of experience and meaning making with participants case study methods were utilised, where the participants and I engaged in semi-structured in-depth interview conversations (Interview guides, Appendices 5, 6, & 7). In-depth interview conversations are a relational form of knowledge sharing and qualitative research praxis.

Applying social constructionism and narrative approaches by utilising interview conversation practise acknowledges that people are meaning makers and live storied lives. By drawing on social constructionism, I am taking the stance that human lives are experienced subjectively whereby individuals and collectives create meaning regarding phenomena (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Moreover, meaning making is influenced by time, place, history, culture, and context (Frost & Ouellette, 2011). However, at the same time, I still acknowledge that we live in a material world where hardships such as poverty, notwithstanding subjective experience, do exist (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). By having open and in-depth conversations with Lucy and Rose we were able to explore and share their experiences that held meaning and significance to them.

Lucy

My first participant engagements were with Lucy. For our first introductory meet up, Lucy chose for her and me to meet at her local library. Prioritising participants' preferences for interview settings works toward reducing power dynamics between a researcher and participant (Pe-Pua, 1989). From the start of the research process, I sought to reconfirm Lucy's position as a collaborator in the research as well as give praxis to my care for her comfort and feelings of safety (Love, 2011; Prilleltensky, 2003). An example of this was by acknowledging the potential significance of place and space for participant's during our engagements (Stolte & Hodgetts, 2013). Providing a research place and space of equity and comfort lays a foundation for engaging in authentic whakawhanaungatanga, rapport, and trust building. Establishing meaningful connections fosters in depth meaningful conversation, providing a safe space for participants to go beyond the public narrative to explore the private narrative (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). Furthermore, collaborating with participants in decision-making processes enacts Te Tiriti o Waitangi principals of participation, partnership, and protection.

Lucy chose the library as it was geographically convenient for her to travel to, a place she was familiar with, and it had plenty of free parking. When participants are engaging in research processes, as a researcher working alongside those experiencing hardship, I have a responsibility to be aware of contextual factors influencing their ongoing participation, such as travel and parking issues. I had asked Lucy if she would like me to pick her up from her home and for me to book us a private room at the library. However, she preferred to drive herself and to utilise the public seating spaces.

The initial meeting Lucy and I had had did not involve any interviewing. Instead, the purpose was to take this time to greet each other *kanohi ki te kanohi* (face-to-face) for the first time, to get to know each other and build rapport. I brought along *kai* (food and drink) for Lucy and I share together. It is customary in both Māori and Pākehā cultures to provide food in certain contexts. However, Black (2010, p. 30) argues that during “*introductory formalities*”, it is not uncommon in Pākehā culture for the sharing of food to be viewed as unnecessary and left out of interactions. In *tikanga* Māori (Māori custom, protocol), the practice of providing food to those you are welcoming is an important act in demonstrating *manaakitanga* (respect, generosity, and care for others) (Mead, 2016). Providing my participants with food and drink, or sustenance, not only demonstrates respect and care it is also a gesture of reciprocity for their contribution to the research. Thus, authentically enacting the ethics and people-centred values underpinning this research thesis.

Lucy brought along her oldest daughter to our introductory meeting, who went between sitting with us and playing in the library. Lucy and I conversed about our families, our current situations and histories, and the research project, with the three of us sharing in the food. When our time together was coming to an end, I gave Lucy hardcopies of the Information Sheet and Consent Forms (Appendices 2 and 3) for her to take home to read, sign, and return a copy at our next get together. We made a time to meet for our first recorded

interview, which Lucy was keen to do as soon as possible. We meet three days later at the same location.

Meeting Lucy at the library for our first recorded interview conversation, I provided coffee (I had contacted Lucy prior to ask for her coffee order), bottled water, and snacks. Lucy chose a seating area for us, we had a brief catch up on how we were both doing, and I asked Lucy if she was keen for us to karakia (pray) before beginning. In tikanga Māori it is customary to begin meetings with a karakia (prayer, blessing, incantation) to invoke protection and positive outcomes from time spent together. Appropriate use of karakia varies over time, place, and occasion (Mead, 2016). When seeking Māori cultural guidance from April and Rose, they had offered me a place and context appropriate karakia, *He Honore* (Appendix 8) to use within my participant engagements in Tauranga Moana. Additionally, we discussed that Māori are not a homogenous group therefore the use of karakia may not be favourable for all. To ensure respectful engagement with participants, I was encouraged to seek participants' preference for the use of karakia or not, and to be prepared to deliver the karakia myself in te reo Māori (Māori language) if asked to do so. Lucy declined to have a karakia.

Together, Lucy and I went through the consent form again to ensure she was comfortable with, and understood, that there were no obligations on her regarding her involvement in the research. I also provided a theme sheet (Appendix 9) for the interview. The theme sheet was used to outline to Lucy the potential topics for our conversation (Barriball & While, 1994). Thus, providing Lucy with the information that I had as the researcher about the topics we were possibly going to discuss (Pe-Pua, 1989). The use of the theme sheet was utilised as a guideline and not as a rigid format to follow. I had an interview schedule of semi-structured and open-ended questions as a guidance tool in our conversation. However, I asked questions and then followed Lucy's lead on the direction and depth of

information she was keen to share. I asked follow-up questions to develop my understanding, to clarify points, and/or to seek further details on information Lucy shared. Our first interview conversation lasted two hours and 45 minutes.

During our first interview conversation, and in alignment with a relational research approach, Lucy and I discussed a wide range of topics. Lucy shared her experiences of her personal and familial history, her circumstances that led to her engaging with the welfare system, as well as her current situation. In discussing earlier instances of attempting to seek assistance from help services including WINZ, Lucy shared the difficulty in accessing such services. During this particular time, the serious injuries of a close family member meant Lucy was required to become their fulltime carer. Furthermore, Lucy's father passed away during this time and Lucy felt that she needed to move her family into her mother's home to support her through the loss of her husband. Lucy's mother was also suffering from significant mental health issues. Additionally, throughout this time Lucy was a heavily pregnant mother of one. Lucy reflected on what a difficult time this was at multiple levels, adding that the difficulty her and her whānau had in accessing support created further stress to the already demanding life circumstances occurring. This culmination of circumstances speaks to the importance of understanding the contextual factors that amalgamate in the everyday lives of those seeking support from welfare services.

Later that same day, I checked in with Lucy via text to see how she was doing following our first interview. Interview conversations can be confronting for participants, particularly where topics of personal experience and hardship are concerned. Feelings and past traumas may re/surface or become exposed, resulting in participants feeling vulnerable (Rappaport, 2000). Conversely, discussing such issues and experiences may also result in participants feeling empowered and heard (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Rappaport, 2000). Lucy responded to my query by stating that she felt "*really good*" and that having the

opportunity to “*share my story*” was a positive and empowering experience (Lucy, personal communication, August 16, 2018). As the researcher I felt encouraged that Lucy described her experience as positive, which spoke to the reciprocal nature of the person-centred research approach. Accordingly, participating in the narrative processes of the research project was providing personal benefit to Lucy. This was of importance to me in my care and responsibility to the collaborating participants working alongside me (Hodgetts et al., 2010; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012).

The following week, Lucy and I met for our second audio recorded interview conversation, which was at the same previous time of day and library location as chosen by Lucy. As with our previous engagements, I brought along kai (food and drink refreshments) and a new topic theme sheet (Appendix 10) relevant to interview number two. After some time, Lucy had not arrived. After waiting for what seemed a reasonable length of time to account for Lucy running late, I thought it best to phone her to see if everything was alright. Lucy did not answer her phone so I sent her a text message stating that I was happy to keep waiting or if re-scheduling would suit her better that was fine as well.

Lucy did get in touch and shared that she was running late as her washing machine had broken down. A broken appliance may seem like a run of the mill issue for those with easy access to resources. For Lucy, an issue such as a broken washing machine is a genuine source of stress and further financial and practical hardship. A scenario such as this has the potential to negatively impact the short and long term financial, psychological, and emotional wellbeing of someone in Lucy’s position (Hodgetts et al., 2010). Additionally, being a sole mother, Lucy was managing this on her own whilst also trying to get her three children organised and off to school and early childhood education for the day, also with the added pressure of having an engagement to attend. Nevertheless, Lucy was keen to carry on with

our scheduled meeting, stating that it would be a good stress outlet and a welcomed distraction from the current events.

Lucy arrived and we discussed her mornings events. To start off the recorded portion of our conversation, we began by looking at the theme sheet for that session and I again asked Lucy how she felt about our last interview conversation. Lucy commented, *“Yeah good! Yeah, it was awesome having a chat and yeah like I said I haven’t talked about all of that for a long time. So, it was good going over it”*. Lucy communicating that her interview experience has remained a positive one was again encouraging and reinforced that genuine enactment of reciprocity was occurring within the research process for my participant. The audio recorded portion of our second interview conversation took just over two hours. We ended with a short chat to debrief our time together. I informed Lucy that I would be transcribing her interviews and would be in touch with those.

I transcribed, in full, both of the audio-recorded interview conversations that Lucy and I had together. In the transcript, I included utterances that I felt added to the context and/or meaning of what was being communicated. Utterances such as pauses, laughter, tears, and so on can help to interpret the meanings behind words and can at times assist in ‘reading between the lines’. Making notes such as when sarcasm has been used can change the meaning. Taking notes of tone and expression such as when sarcasm has been used are also important as a transcribed word such as ‘great’, can have the opposite meaning when used with sarcasm. During the transcribing process, as the researcher, I was immersed in the recorded conversations and the knowledge shared. While transcribing I took my own notes regarding thoughts, interpretations, questions and so on that contributed to my understanding and interpretive analysis. I was also taking note of discussion points shared by Lucy that were consistent with relevant academic literature.

Once the first and second interviews had been transcribed, I emailed each to Lucy, respectively. In the emails, I reiterated to Lucy that she was entitled to change, retract, or comment further on anything within the transcript documents, as well as add anything new. In each email, I also stated that Lucy was under no obligation to read the two documents if she did not want to, the choice was hers. I also offered to send hardcopies to Lucy if she preferred as I knew her only internet access at home was through her smartphone, which may have created barriers in reading the two large documents, totalling 67 pages between the two. People living in circumstances such as Lucy's are often time poor and again may not have practical access to internet services (Lister, 2004). Lucy gave her approval for me to continue with the transcripts as were and continue with my interpretive analysis processes.

Now Lucy and I had finished our recorded interview sessions and Lucy had granted her approval for the transcribed material I presented to her. This meant that I could now offer her a koha (gift) for her participation and sharing of knowledge, experience, and time. The University of Waikato School of Psychology *Ethics Review for Human Research – Guidelines* (2018) state that participants should not be presented with or told of the potential for gifts of thanks and reciprocity until after research completion. It is argued that such acts may cause duress or undue pressure on participants to respond or behave in certain ways (Largent, Grady, Miller, & Wertheimer, 2012). Not wanting to compromise my collaborating participants comfort or freedom to share as they saw fit, I did not reveal to them my intention to present each of them with a koha after the interviewing process. When applying for ethical approval to undertake this research I was required to state my intentions around the use of koha.

Koha is a Māori term and concept which within this research process refers to, “*gift, present, offering, donation, contribution - especially one maintaining social relationships and has connotations of reciprocity*” (Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary, n.p., 2020). When

considering offering koha to participants, the *Ethics Review for Human Research – Guidelines* require that researchers understand the “*true intention of the traditional meaning*” (2018, p. 5). In my ethics application, I stated my intention to gift supermarket vouchers as koha to my potential participants as reciprocity and acknowledgment for their time, knowledge, and invaluable contribution to the research. My argument for gifting supermarket vouchers was that my target group, sole mothers accessing support from WINZ, often live in precarious life circumstances. Those living in precarity often sacrifice purchasing food in order to meet other payments (Jackson & Graham, 2017), therefore the choice of gifting a food and grocery voucher may meaningfully offer a momentary respite in their day-to-day living.

I contacted Lucy to arrange a suitable time and place for us to meet to gift Lucy her koha. Lucy suggested that I come to her workplace in her break-time. Since our last face-to-face engagement, through her own connections, Lucy had secured a part-time job, with hours that suited her regarding her children’s education schedules. Meeting up with Lucy at her workplace, we enjoyed a hug and some informal conversation, and I was able to present Lucy with my thanks and her koha. My next participant engagements were with Rose.

Rose

As stated above, Rose and I came into contact informally through common networks. Initially, Rose and I had been connected when I sought help with my Māori cultural practice. Rose and her colleague, April, met with me to help with my ongoing learning regarding cultural competency when engaging with Māori people and communities. From this engagement, Rose offered to assist in the participant recruitment process of the research. Eventually, Rose herself became a participant in the research, sharing her experiences and knowledge as a social worker and advocate, including supporting those engaging with Work

and Income New Zealand, as well as having been a sole mother welfare recipient herself in the past.

Due to Rose's busy and demanding schedule it took some time to arrange a time for our audio-recorded interview conversation. Psychologists undertaking relational person-centred research approaches understand that, wherever possible, researchers need to accommodate participants and their needs, and not the other way around (Estacio, 2012). Rose suggested that we meet at a café on a Saturday morning. However, when the time came, the childcare Rose had arranged for that morning fell through. Rose was keen to continue with our scheduled get together so offered for us to sit and chat at her house. Flexibility is an important characteristic where community psychology based practices are concerned. Where person-centred research is authentically implemented it is important to recognise the dynamic nature of processes involved throughout (Estacio, 2012). Adaptability speaks to ensuring the welfare and comfort of participants as well as acknowledging that initial plans throughout the research may need to change to best serve participants and/or the research (Estacio, 2012).

Establishing that Rose was indeed comfortable with welcoming me into her home, we proceeded with this plan. I arrived at Rose's home to a warm welcome, where Rose then introduced me to her family members who were present. It was humbling to be invited into Rose's home, particularly during their free time at the weekend. As stated above, aligning with tikanga practices and my own values, I supplied food for us to share together. Rose reciprocated *manaaki* (take care of, give hospitality to) by offering me coffee and a cold drink. Rose's home was busy with people and with family noise. At one point, we paused the interview as Rose had visitors arrive. Some researchers may view these types of circumstances as inconvenient or distracting (Pe-Pua, 1989). However, I found being immersed in a moment of Rose's real world an enriching and privileged experience. Engagements such as these align with values within community psychology and kaupapa

Māori research that have practitioners prioritise authenticity within relationships (Cram, 2017; Riemer et al., 2020). These types of authentic interactions speak to the value of Māori tikanga relational processes of whakawhanaungatanga (process of establishing relationships, relating well to others), manaakitanga (the process of showing respect, generosity, and care for others), and to the value of whanaungatanga (relationship, friendship, or reciprocal relationship).

As I had with Lucy, I asked Rose if she would like for us to karakia (prayer, blessing, incantation) before we began the audio-recorded portion of our time together. Rose stated that she had already performed a karakia before I arrived, I shared that I had done the same, so she was happy to proceed without us performing karakia together. Rose and I followed much of the same processes as Lucy and I had (see *Lucy*), including going over consent (Appendix 3), looking over our theme sheet (Appendix 11), and reaffirming that Rose understood that she was under no obligations regarding our interview. We began our audio-recorded interview conversation which lasted approximately two and a half hours.

Rose shared her personal life stories, and she focused on the positive influence and inspiration offered to her from two of her tīpuna wāhine (female ancestors, grandmothers). She also explained how her drive for social justice came from the strength and kindness of her tīpuna wāhine. Rose also discussed her social justice views as stemming from knowing some of the adversity her tīpuna had experienced due to processes of colonisation, that were still being felt by her and her children generations later. Rose and I discussed many issues, with Rose offering great insight from her unique position as both a professional working in the social work field and as a previous welfare recipient herself. Rose shared her experiences candidly as an advocate and social worker, often discussing the “*horrific*” [Rose] treatment those she worked with received when engaging with WINZ. She explained how the systems and processes at WINZ were often so confusing, contradictory, and/or difficult that many

seeking their entitlements “*give up*” because of the demoralising “*hoop jumping*” [Rose] required of them, with no guarantee of positive outcomes at the end. Stories such as these align with literature that address the negative impacts stemmed from the current state of social welfare in neoliberal underpinned societies (Edmiston, 2018; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Lister, 2004; Schrecker & Bamba, 2015; Standing, 2011; Starke, 2008).

Due to time constraints relating to the research timeline and to Rose’s busy schedule, I decided to not pursue a second interview. Moreover, the richness of information shared by Rose in our conversation was beyond sufficient for the research purposes. As I had done with Lucy, I transcribed my and Rose’s audio-recorded conversation in full. I emailed this to Rose stating, as I had with Lucy, that she was under no obligation to read the document but was entitled to do so and to change, retract, clarify, and/or add to her contribution. Following Rose’s approval of the transcript, we arranged a time to meet for coffee and lunch. During our lunch together I was able to gift Rose with a *koha* (gift of reciprocity), as a thank you for her sharing of knowledge, time, experience, and significant contribution to the research (for further details regarding *koha* see *Lucy*).

Now that Lucy, Rose, and I had completed our interview conversations, with both giving their approval to utilise the knowledge they had shared, I continued with the analysis process.

Analysis

The analysis process was ongoing throughout the research, having begun prior to the completion of participant interview conversations. When engaging with the participants I was already thinking, note taking, and critically reflecting on what was being said, what was not being said, and what may be contributing to their knowledge constructions. Knowledge discovery was undertaken through qualitative, semi-structured interview conversations with the two research participants Lucy and Rose (further details in *Participant engagements*). The

use of interview conversations aligned well with social constructionist and community psychology frameworks and was a good fit for the research purpose. Exploring the constructed storytelling of participants facilitated an alternative view, one that differed from the neoliberal bound dominant narrative often ascribed to sole mothers requiring state welfare assistance (Breheny & Stephens, 2009; Rappaport, 2000). When undergoing analysis and interpretation of the knowledge and experience shared by Lucy and Rose, and in critiquing the structures within which they live their lives, I utilised a diverse range of complimentary analytic and interpretive approaches. Aspects of narrative, phenomenological, feminist theory and intersectionality, as well as aspects of Kaupapa Māori approaches were employed as the appropriate frameworks for ongoing analysis within this research.

Narrative approaches

When researching people's experiences of hardship, there is a call to embrace engaged research implementation (Frost & Ouellette, 2011; Hodgetts et al., 2014). Narrative approaches facilitate engaged processes through the sharing of stories and through the analysis process of engaging with participants and their knowledge to provide well thought out interpretations (Liamputtong, 2012). Within psychology, there has been less regard given to narrative research information than data that align with naturalistic science models (Frost & Ouellette, 2011; Rimke, 2016). However, insights provided through narrative accounts make an important contribution in matters of social policy and social justice (Frost, 2018; Frost & Ouellette, 2011). Furthermore, gaining in-depth knowledge from a participant regarding their life worlds informs researchers' understandings on the role that contextual factors and power dynamics play when regarding issues of social justice (Frost & Ouellette, 2011).

In cases, if the researcher positions themselves as 'the expert' and positions participants as 'less than' or as a problem there is a risk of epistemological violence (EV)

(Teo, 2010). A social constructionist perspective reflects that the standpoints of participants also provide viable interpretations and insights into human experiences. Those utilising narrative approaches posit that people's lives are storied and that re/telling stories helps us to construct meaning and make sense of our experiences and lives in partnership with participants (Hasford, Loomis, Nelson, & Pancer, 2013). Through interpretation, psychologists create representations of meaning from knowledge shared. To avoid EV, there is an epistemological responsibility then for those offering interpretations to be authentically reflexive of their own positions and limitations and to understand that researcher interpretations have impact (L. T. Smith, 2012; Teo, 2010).

First-person narratives allow audiences to hear bottom-up accounts of personal life hardships that reflect the broader injustices occurring at policy and societal levels (Frost & Ouellette, 2011; Hasford et al., 2013). Offering narratives from those experiencing the researched phenomena first-hand call into question, and can counteract, the often dominant pathologising narrative formed by 'expert professionals' (Frost & Ouellette, 2011). In a neoliberal context, often those in positions of power use narratives that pathologises sole mother welfare recipients as deviant, lazy, and as needing 'encouragement' to move away from welfare 'dependence' (Nelson, 2013; Standing, 2011). However, such dominant pathologising narratives traditionally do not consider the contextual factors occurring in the everyday life worlds of sole mothers, which can be teased out through narrative analysis interpretations. Consequently, through audiences listening to sole mother's accounts, who themselves have not engaged with WINZ, may experience *empathetic generalisation* (see *Theoretical perspectives*) (Hodgetts et al., 2019). Whereby, potentially developing understandings and empathy for sole mother welfare recipients, which may encourage social inclusion and a collective call for social justice issues regarding sole mothers and the Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare system (Frost, 2018; Frost & Ouellette, 2011). Addressing

inequality and social injustice will not only benefit those afflicted by the system, but society as a whole (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2017).

Employing narrative frameworks means participants are viewed as being much more than just sources of information (Frost & Ouellette, 2011; Prilleltensky, 2001), since narrative frameworks also offer benefits for research participants. Meaning making constructions are an ongoing process and can facilitate new meanings when being shared with others (Liamputtong, 2012). Lucy, a participant in the research, stated that being able to share her story was a positive experience for her, reflecting the reciprocal nature of narrative approaches. Additionally, during an interview conversation with Rose, the ongoing meaning making nature of narrative processes was evident in her statement, *“I didn’t realise that until right now”*. Hence, for Rose, her realisation through her verbalisation and dialogue also elicited feelings of empowerment and discovery for her, providing her own analysis space. People who experience oppression and marginalisation often go unheard, whereas social justice researchers purposefully seek out those within oppressed positions/groups, working alongside them to hear and learn from their knowledge to assist in rectifying harmful social systems (Hodgetts et al., 2016; Rappaport, 2000). Narrative analysis is an interpretive process through which psychologists seek to understand diverse personal and socio-political intricacies that play out in everyday storied lives within and between each level of society (Esin, Fathi, & Squire, 2014). Narrative approaches and analysis not only allow practitioners to investigate and interpret the ways in which lives are storied and shaped by unjust systems, but such analyses also assist in the exploration and transformation of the diverse conditions that uphold these phenomena (Daiute & Fine, 2003).

Phenomenological approaches

The aim of this research project is to understand the ways in which engagement with WINZ impacts on the lives of sole mothers, hence utilising phenomenological approaches.

Phenomenology is an explorative methodology concerned with valuing and understanding a person's lived experiences through their own perceptions and interpretations to understand a phenomenon (Bryman, 2016; Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenology is particularly useful when researchers strive to look beyond mainstream taken-for-granted assumptions regarding phenomena to discover deeper aspects that go beyond surface understandings (Finlay, 2008). Abductively analysing participants' accounts aids in discovering an essence of phenomena, in this case welfare and neoliberalism (Creswell et al., 2007; Thomas, 2010).

Social researchers utilising phenomenological approaches believe that it is necessary for the researcher to be aware of their own preconceptions or assumptions that may influence interpretive and analytic processes (Bryman, 2016; Groenewald, 2004). Some phenomenological researchers promote 'bracketing' whereby one's own world views, preconceptions, and social positioning are set aside to foster objectivity (Groenewald, 2004). However, as discussed above, from an ecological and relational perspective people and context are so heavily intertwined and embedded within each other that they cannot be separated (De Fina, 2011; Giddens, 1982; Liamputtong, 2012). Therefore, regarding phenomenology, I subscribe to a reflexive approach whereby I reflect on and think critically about my own world views, preconceptions, and intersections of social positioning and how they may influence my practice, analysis, and interpretations (Finlay, 2008).

Feminist approaches and intersectionality

Feminist theory and research span a wide range of scholars, issues, and perspectives. However, for the purposes of this study I drew on feminist approaches to research as outlined by community psychologists R. Campbell and Wasco (2000). The broad objective of feminist approaches in social science is to uncover the multiple systemic issues that marginalise and oppress women's lives, and that transformation of such systems ultimately leads to women's empowerment (R. Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Furthermore, CP and feminist approaches

complement and inform each other through the removal of hierarchical dynamics between participants and researcher as well as an approach that is women centred, viewing their knowledge as valid and legitimate (R. Campbell & Wasco, 2000).

In recent decades, within Aotearoa/New Zealand and abroad, many women have been affected by the neoliberal ideologies that have underpinned the state welfare system. This shift from a socialist democracy to individualistic neoliberalism saw significant impacts toward the marginalising of sole mothers (Cheyne et al., 2008; Starke, 2008). Regarding sole parenting, sole mothers and their children are disproportionately more highly represented in the welfare system than sole fathers (Breheny & Stephens, 2009). Hence, the role of gender must be considered. Neoliberal notions of minimal government interference and personal responsibility are exercised through the decline of welfare provision and resources, and through increasing recipient obligations (Breheny & Stephens, 2009). Therefore, significant and ongoing welfare retrenchment often continues to position sole mothers and their children in lives of poverty, hardship, and blame.

In the current social climate, sole mother beneficiaries are frequently viewed as deviant, dependant, and as makers of 'immoral' 'choices' (Baker & Tippin, 2002; Breheny & Stephens, 2009). The neoliberal resource allocation and social positioning of single parents devalues their work as mothers, delegitimises their citizenship and participation (Breheny & Stephens, 2009), and propagates negative homogenising myths (Shildrick & MacDonald, 2013). Interestingly, societal notions of full-time stay-at-home mothers who are financially supported by a partner are constructed as being privileged and as the ideal (Kidger, 2004). Neoliberal expectations, of deserving and undeserving poorer people intersect with the differing perceptions of motherhood, constructions of work, and sources of income (Baker & Tippin, 2002; Breheny & Stephens, 2009).

The concept of *intersectionality* can assist in examining areas of concern regarding the inclusion of diverse people/s, social positions, and contexts (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013). Crenshaw (1989) introduced intersectionality when arguing that in the United States the Women's Rights movement at the time was advancing the plight of straight, white women but ignored the needs and voices of African American and lesbian women (as cited in Carbado et al., 2013). Without discussing the diverse intersections of people positioned in marginalised groups there is a risk in research to become sites of "*discrimination through prototypical representat[ions]*" (Carbado et al., 2013, p. 304).

Regarding the current research, diverse identity and context intersections have been included and considered. When engaging with the participants and with their knowledge it was important to consider their intersectional social positioning (that is age, gender, ethnicity, etc) and how these might impact on their experiences and social constructions.

Both participants in this study identify as woman, as mothers, and as Māori. Where low income, sole motherhood, and certain ethnicities intersect, the likelihood of living in poverty increases (Baker & Tippin, 2002). However, the systemic processes that promote and maintain such oppression and hardships are often ignored and are instead understood as issues of individual responsibility and blame (Breheny & Stephens, 2009; Harvey, 2007; Nelson, 2013). For example, sole fathers may not be held to the same standard of social morality as sole mothers (Breheny & Stephens, 2009). Additionally, when engaging with welfare agencies in Aotearoa/New Zealand, a Māori woman may have an added layer of oppression in comparison with a Pākehā woman, relating to interpersonal and institutional colonialism and racism (Bullock & Reppond, 2018). Furthermore, issues of internalised racism based on colonial histories need to be considered. Oppression and privilege can be found in (but are not limited to) the intersections of constructions of un/paid work, motherhood, ethnicity, and income source. By implementing feminist and intersectionality

analysis frameworks to unveil multiple layers of oppression, this research contributes to the social justice agenda of improving the human condition.

To understand lived experiences of hardship, it is imperative that CP researchers consider both material deprivation as well as the ramifications of social phenomena (Bullock & Reppond, 2018). By utilising appropriate aspects of narrative, phenomenological, and feminist and intersectionality approaches within this research, I am able to make visible the heterogeneous social positions and lived experiences of sole mothers (Hulko, 2009). While also bringing attention to issues of sexism, racism, classism, socio-economic status, and other forms of discrimination that may impact sole mothers when accessing support from the current neoliberal bound Work and Income New Zealand (Bullock & Reppond, 2018).

My analytical interpretations of Lucy's and Rose's contributions are shared over the next two chapters.

Chapter Three: Case Study Analysis – Lucy

Lucy, a sole mother of three young children, came to engage with the Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare agency Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ) due to leaving an abusive relationship with her children's father. It can be incredibly difficult for women to leave abusive relationships, due to the fear of safety, financial, material, and housing insecurity (Robertson et al., 2007). Incidentally, having a welfare system that includes payments for sole parents does provide some form of safety net for women such as those in Lucy's situation. Lucy demonstrates that having the courage to leave the violence has meant significant positive change for her and her children, *"It's just like the best thing I ever did, ever, ever did was leave him and that toxic situation..."*. However, the current austere neoliberal underpinning of the Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare system limits the extent to which women receive meaningful and adequate resourcing and support during such traumatic transitional periods (Jackson & Graham, 2017). Furthermore, through interpretive analysis, this research seeks to expose the ways in which the current system contributes to the everyday hardships of sole mothers, such as Lucy, who are in need. Within our two interview conversations, Lucy shared rich narratives regarding her every day and life experiences. Arising in our conversations and in regard to Lucy's experiences of WINZ, shared in this chapter are the concepts of labelling and internalisation, constrained choice, inadequate resourcing, embodiment of poverty and stigma, and healthism.

Labelling and internalisation

There is much academic literature that indicates that sole mothers receiving welfare are routinely homogenised and labelled as lazy, immoral, getting a free-ride, and of being incapable (Bullock & Reppond, 2018; Rosen, 2019; Standing, 2011). However, such negative labels can be misrepresentative, as Lucy states, *"it's so hard, it's hard being a single mother*

on the benefit...you live around it [low income] and you make it work". Negative stereotyping can have undermining effects on sole mothers at every ecological level, micro to macro.

When the notion of intersectionality (see *Feminist approaches and intersectionality*) is applied to the diversity of personal positions of sole mothers', layers of multiple oppressions can be made visible. Around the globe, racist stereotyping significantly impacts people with brown or 'black' skin tone more greatly than those with Caucasian appearance. Lucy identifies as both Māori (indigenous New Zealander) and of being of European descent. Lucy discussed occurrences of feeling overtly marginalised and discriminated against regarding her Māori identity, remarking that she felt that she was viewed by others as "*just another Māori getting on the benefit, on the dole*". Lucy shared that she often felt negatively stereotyped due to her sole mother status, welfare receipt, and ethnicity. Where social locations such as sole motherhood, ethnicity, indigeneity, being 'poor', gender, age, and receiving welfare intersect, the negative stereotyping compounds to position sole mother welfare recipients as a constructed 'undeserving underclass' (Bullock & Reppond, 2018; Rosen, 2019). Deconstructing the marginalising and oppressive stereotypes associated with particular aspects of one's identity requires addressing the structural issues that maintain them, such as societal moral and familial ideals, colonialism, institutional racism, devaluing of mothering as labour, and dominant neoliberal political and economic principles (Crothers & Fletcher, 2015).

Interestingly, through pushing back against negative labelling and stereotyping, Lucy still unconsciously perpetuates neoliberal ideologies that position her as a delegitimised and 'undeserving' citizen. Lucy focused her rejection to the stereotype of "*just another Māori getting on the benefit*" by stating "*I've been paying taxes since I was 12*". In this instance, Lucy detaches herself from the stereotype of a Māori beneficiary as a drain on society by

expressing her individual 'active citizenship'. Lucy offers that "*paying taxes*" is a legitimisation of citizenship and social entitlement. Although welfare benefits are taxed, within a neoliberal context the narrative of being a 'taxpayer' is usually reserved for those in paid employment (Rogers-Dillon, 1995). Though neoliberalism promotes minimal government interference, including low taxation, the role of being in paid labour, that is adhering to neoliberal constructions of an 'economic contributor', is prioritised. Using the term 'taxpayer' is a legitimising label used to differentiate between welfare beneficiaries, regardless of previous or current tax contribution, and those in paid employment (Rafferty & Wiggan, 2011; Rogers-Dillon, 1995). Thus, contributing further to the 'us' 'them' paradigm between 'undeserving' sole mother welfare recipients and other 'deserving' members of society, thus undermining social solidarity (Breheny & Stephens, 2009; Rogers-Dillon, 1995).

The social stratification and constructed classism that is reflected in notions such as the 'undeserving underclass', create and maintain 'us' and 'them' boundaries, within and between constructed groups. The 'us' and 'them' distancing serves to maintain the power and status of certain groups over others. Such distancing has relevance for differences relating to race, socioeconomic status, and constructions of 'the poor' that overlap in complex ways. Although Lucy is herself a welfare recipient, within her narrative she frequently used statements to distance herself from 'other' beneficiaries. For example, when reflecting on what life as a sole parent has been like, Lucy acknowledged the hardship, but also her capacity to adapt and her efforts to live a more frugal life,

...is a struggle, it's a struggle. But you have to learn to adapt to it. And just because you can't get the expensive brand of whatever, then you know, make the sacrifice, you have to... you just have to learn to adapt. Cause obviously you'll struggle if you don't.

Here, Lucy has distanced herself from those she believes may be struggling due to mismanagement of money and poor decision making. The above statement suggests that

Lucy has internalised a neoliberal narrative of beneficiaries struggling due to their own lack of financial ability, including accusations of others making ‘frivolous’ choices. Such commonplace expressions align with the laying of blame for situations of poverty on the individual. This diverts attention from instead questioning the inadequate benefit levels calculated by WINZs governing body, the Ministry of Social Development. Lucy has mentioned throughout her narrative that the current income rate she receives is not enough to move beyond the treadmill of survival mode. Yet, she herself also frequently minimises structural inequities with statements like that shown above (Chase & Walker, 2013).

Constrained choice

For Lucy, the neoliberal narrative of ‘poor decision making’ ascribed to sole mothers regarding welfare receipt has become internalised. Lucy describes feelings of shame when sharing her experiences about having to prove financial hardship to WINZ, that is, having to prove her poverty status to the institution that her income support is received from,

Even having to go to a budgeter, like I mean I enjoy going to budgeters, but I can see how people would think that it’s kind of a degrading feeling that I can’t manage my own money. Like you know, you think that I’m here just to get free money or I’m actually really struggling. You can see that I’m struggling but having to *prove* that you’re struggling is like another thing. (Original emphasis).

While Lucy appears not to mind the social interaction, what she finds distressing is the “*degrading feeling*” of having to prove that she is managing her money as best she can with what little is provided, while at the same time proving that she is struggling in poverty. This dehumanising process of contradiction reveals the power imbalance between those administering welfare and those receiving it. Regardless of the level of distress that such surveillance processes as above may cause Lucy, she has no choice but to comply otherwise she may be sanctioned. Such demoralising welfare obligations reinforce the shame and

stigmatisation for woman such as Lucy. Additionally, for Lucy, having to prove her hardship will not result in a permanent increase in support.

In the above quote, Lucy also mentions that if she is not able to “*prove*” her hardship then that may be perceived by WINZ as having an easy free-ride financially, which again plays into negative welfare narratives regarding sole mothers (Breheny & Stephens, 2009; Masters et al., 2014). The obligations to accommodate financial surveillance and scrutiny by WINZ (as shared in Lucy’s above quote), place sole mothers in a lose-lose situation whereby they will be stigmatised no matter the outcome of dis/proving their hardship. Recipients will either be labelled as free-riding or bad at managing their money, both of which promote individual blame and work to conceal structural explanations (Davis & Hagen, 1996; Masters et al., 2014). Yet, women such as Lucy have no choice but to engage in such dehumanising lose-lose processes. Regarding the above mentioned budgeting obligations, to protect herself, Lucy attempts to distance herself from those ‘others’ with ‘poor’ money management and from the shame of poverty by adopting a third-person view of her own situation in the statement, “*I can see how [other] people would...*”. During such obligatory processes, the only strategy, or ‘choice’, available to Lucy is to try to mitigate the negative personal impacts.

Another area of Lucy’s life where her choices are constrained is her desire to be a stay-at-home-parent (SAHP). Lucy has expressed that her dream job is “*to be a good mother, that’s my number one job. That’s all I want to be successful in, is being a mother*”. However, Aotearoa/New Zealand’s political, economic, and social ideology are largely dominated by neoliberal underpinnings. Neoliberal underpinnings promote economic contribution as of greater importance to individual and societal responsibility, than that of SAHP (Gray, 2019). For women who are financially dependent on a partner, the choice to SAHP goes largely unquestioned (Rogers-Dillon, 1995). However, for sole mothers who are dependent on

welfare assistance wanting to SAHP, this choice is greatly constrained and contested (Rafferty & Wiggan, 2011). Constraint is applied through welfare reforms that have reduced entitlements, increased sanctions and work expectations for sole parents, and through political and social narratives of sole mothers on welfare being immoral, lazy, scroungers taking taxpayers for a ride (Rafferty & Wiggan, 2011; Standing, 2011). Often, sole mothers are homogenised by misrepresentative stereotyping that is not applied to partnered mothers who choose to SAHP (Rogers-Dillon, 1995).

Throughout this thesis chapter, Lucy has consistently demonstrated her commitment, hard work and care for her children, such as prioritising them over herself where she will go without medical care, warmth, and light to accommodate their provision, health, and wellbeing. There is much academic literature to support that paid work is not a guaranteed pathway out of poverty (Beddoe & Keddell, 2016; M. C. Dale, O'Brien, St. John, & Child Poverty Action Group, 2011; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). Regarding the WINZ objective to push sole mothers off of welfare by constraining agency for women such as Lucy to SAHP, it is argued that impinging on sole mothers' welfare access and discrediting their parenting abilities is not so much about believing that paid work will increase the wellbeing of them and their children, but a socially constructed austere political tactic to justify moving sole mothers off state provided welfare (Beddoe, 2015; Beddoe & Keddell, 2016). In other words, politically driven agendas stating that work is the best option for sole mothers and their children, is based on moral judgement and individual responsibility, not familial wellbeing (Beddoe, 2015; Beddoe & Keddell, 2016).

Inadequate resourcing

Lucy shared that to get by on the current austere welfare resourcing that recipients should just make sacrifices in order to “*adapt*” to the financial hardship, “...*it's a struggle. But you have to learn to adapt to it...you have to... you just have to learn to adapt. Cause*

obviously you'll struggle if you don't". In this statement Lucy has demonstrated her double consciousness regarding her low allocated income and a neoliberal narrative of individual responsibility and blame. Lucy puts forward the neoliberal narrative of 'making better choices will help you adapt' to the limited financial resourcing from WINZ, yet Lucy has taken steps to "*adapt*" and knows that she is still struggling. In trying to reconcile this contradictory internal conflict, Lucy has been led to self-criticise her money management stating that she is "*not that good with money*". In fact, Lucy has demonstrated throughout her narrative that she takes immense steps to manage her money, especially for the sake of her children, such as, on winter nights after her children have gone to bed, Lucy shares that "*I'm sitting in the dark and there's nothing on, not even the heater or the lights... any little thing I can do to save money is all good, gosh*" (original emphasis). Lucy's "*gosh*" at the end of her statement, in the context of our interview conversation, came across as a moment of realisation of the lengths she is forced to go to in attempts to stretch her income as far as possible. The above contradictions demonstrate the insidiousness of neoliberal narratives of individual responsibility and of fallacious labelling of those requiring welfare, whereby regardless of the inadequacy of income levels for welfare recipients, individual blame has become embedded in Lucy's narrative and internalised within herself.

For many people trying to survive on welfare, the financial provision allocated by WINZ is not adequate to sustain even the most basic of human needs (Jackson & Graham, 2017). Those living in poverty often have to make difficult, and sometimes detrimental, decisions on where what little money they have will be allocated. Lucy shares how there are often times when costs cannot be covered, so her basic human needs will go unmet. This is reflected in Lucy revealing that, "*I'll be sacrificing the food money, yeah there's no other choice, or the gas[petrol] money. First, it's the gas money*". Although there is the common assumption in Aotearoa/New Zealand that welfare provision is sufficient to cover the cost of

everyday living, this simply is not the case (Jackson & Graham, 2017). Furthermore, additional assistance from WINZ, such as food grants, have become increasingly difficult to access, with requests often being denied (Jackson & Graham, 2017). Often for those on low incomes, ‘flexible’ food costs are sacrificed in order to pay for fixed price costs such as rent and power, however, taking away from the food budget means that people will go hungry. Moreover, Aotearoa/New Zealand research suggests that low income parents will often go hungry so that their children may be fed (Jackson & Graham, 2017). It is also not uncommon for recipient’s welfare incomes to be altered without notice through ‘glitches in the system’, human error, or unnotified sanctioning (Curchin, 2017; Tonken & Verplanke, 2013). Errors stemming from WINZ may result in consequences that can be felt for weeks or months for sole mothers, with no agency accountability or reparation (Tonken & Verplanke, 2013), this shared by Lucy *“even when it’s their [WINZ] mistake, I will still suffer for it”*. Occurrences such as these add to the precarity and hardships for families.

When the food budget is robbed, Lucy must find food for herself and her children elsewhere. For the sake of her children, and in an attempt to mitigate the effects of food insecurity, Lucy describes having to engage in stigmatising actions such as routinely having to seek out free food from service providers. In one thread of our conversation Lucy mentioned four different places she checks within her local community, including her local doctor’s office, where *“sometimes”* free food is put out for those in need. The food items available from these service providing sites are limited. The food items might include excess fruit and vegetables from home and/or community gardens, or surplus bread donated from a supermarket, this demonstrated in Figure 2. They do not provide full food parcels, but *“sometimes there’s fruit and vegies”, “they have boxes of like mandarins or kiwifruit, bags of bread. And the kids they really love their mandarins”*. Relying on charitable food sources does not provide food security (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017).



Figure 2. Tauranga community garden volunteers sharing excess fresh produce and donated bread items.

(Photo credit: George Novak, March 28, 2018. Retrieved from https://www.nzherald.co.nz/the-country/news/article.cfm?c_id=16&objectid=12019017)

Often charities have insufficient and inadequate food items to offer, and providers are often closed at the weekends (Booth et al., 2018). Furthermore, searching for meagre food supplies is a time and energy consuming exercise, much more time consuming than say popping to the supermarket or walking to the fridge (Booth et al., 2018; Lister, 2004). Lucy also stated that her “gas [petrol] money” is one of the first costs to be cut, which further constrains subsequent decision-making and ‘choices’ regarding exercises such as seeking out food within the community. In proximity to where Lucy lives, the high number of services providing limited access to food speaks to the high level of need in her community.

Regarding poverty and welfare receipt, the occurrence of high levels of food insecurity needs in Lucy’s area aligns with findings from food insecurity research from within Aotearoa/New Zealand (M. C. Dale et al., 2011; Gray, 2019; Hodgetts et al., 2013; Jackson & Graham, 2017), and internationally (Booth et al., 2018; Garthwaite, 2016; MacLeod, Curl, & Kearns, 2019). Such a high level of demand suggests that micro level understandings, such as individual inadequacies, are an inadequate and misguided explanation regarding such widespread hardships regarding access to basic human needs.

Research in Aotearoa/New Zealand has shown that food insecurity is one of the largest causes of stress, worry, shame, and stigma for mothers trying to feed their children (Jackson & Graham, 2017). Sole mothers have little choice but to search for free food to feed their children in order to pay for other necessities such as rent and power. This situation is degrading and inhumane, particularly in an affluent society such as Aotearoa/New Zealand. Due to inadequate welfare resourcing, Lucy, and sole mothers like her, are required to become beggars in order to provide basic needs for their families. The ‘beggars can’t be choosers’ narrative and unempathetic individual blame is taken even further when sole mothers are made to feel that they should be grateful for the leftovers from more affluent citizens (Booth et al., 2018; Rimke, 2016). Lucy stated, that in spite of feeling ashamed and stigmatised, she has no option but to continue with this strategy. Her stance is that *“as long as the kids are fed aye, it’s all that matters. I’d rather get the free fruit and vegies”*. Lucy’s narratives make visible the deliberate ways in which punitive welfare policies are designed to be uncomfortable and difficult, to discourage reliance on welfare, and to ‘motivate’ beneficiaries into behaviour modification and off of welfare for ‘their own good’ (Standing, 2011; Sudden, 2016). However, as is discussed throughout this study, the stance of WINZ to discourage and ‘motivate’ beneficiaries through inadequate supports does not often result in positive outcomes for welfare recipients such as Lucy, but instead causes harm (Standing, 2011; Sudden, 2016).

Embodiment of poverty and stigma

As discussed in Chapter one, stigma is an interpersonal relational process of external stereotyping, marginalisation, and discrimination. A common thread throughout Lucy’s narrative is the presence and embodiment of stigma in her everyday life world. For Lucy, amongst her many other stresses, having to make harsh choices about what most people would consider the most taken-for-granted aspects of daily life is stressful and takes its toll

on her wellbeing (Link & Phelan, 2006). Structural factors such as punitive welfare systems, neoliberal constructions of deservedness, poverty, and stigmatised categorisations have intimate and personal consequences for sole mothers such as Lucy. Such is the intimacy of oppressive conditions and stigma that, for Lucy they have permeated her being by literally ‘getting under the skin’ (Dutta et al., 2016; Hodgetts, Radley, Chamberlain, & Hodgetts, 2007; Stolte & Hodgetts, 2013).

Lucy suffers from a skin condition on her face, hands, and other areas which she describes here as, *“it’s painful and it’s embarrassing and my confidence [has diminished]”* and *“constantly irritated aye, constant irritation”*. Lucy’s skin condition undermines her social interactions and status in a number of ways. Experienced within the context of macro level systems, Lucy’s life world conditions have eroded her interpersonal, emotional, and physical health (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013; Hodgetts et al., 2014). For Lucy, the stresses from social stigma have become physically visible, whereby she has become marked with the suffering of poverty. These skin markings then reveal her poverty and social status, which reinforces and exacerbates her shame and stigma (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2006). In some instances, poverty can be hidden through strategies, such as through debt-based consumerism (Schor, 1998; Thorpe et al., 2015), or by going to great efforts to make sure your children are always presented as clean and tidy. However, being literally marked by way of a skin condition makes visible Lucy’s suffering of low socioeconomic status, reinforcing her loss of dignity within social interactions.

Alongside bearing the physical markers of poverty, the skin condition that Lucy suffers from has eroded her self-image and confidence, *“I’d feel like I was being judged because of my appearance and that. You know I’d feel like I was being judged just on the way I look, just because of my skin, and that’s no good”*. Here Lucy demonstrates how her

stigmatised public identity is impacting on her personal identity (Hurtado, 2018; Vogel et al., 2013). Again, this demonstrates how macro level constructions of stigmatised characteristics can play out in the personal life worlds of sole mothers seeking assistance from welfare. Not only does stigmatisation cause chronic emotional, psychological, and physical distress for those marginalised, the *threat* of further stigmatisation also causes high stress (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013; Link & Phelan, 2006). Lucy signifies these fears by stating, “*Yeah, and it really brings my confidence down, I don’t want to go anywhere*”. For Lucy, the fear of being judged and stigmatised creates further barriers to her already constrained participation in the public world. The concept and process of social exclusion can be applied to Lucy’s current suffering. In Lucy’s case, her skin condition is exacerbated by macro level issues such as poverty and stigmatisation. Lucy then receives further interpersonal judgement and stigmatisation because of her skin condition. Feeling ostracised Lucy retreats from the public world, which advances its own negative effects and repeats the cycle of exclusion (Phelan, Lucas, Ridgeway, & Taylor, 2014).

Unfortunately for Lucy, her avoidance tactics, such as not going out, are not a permanent solution. The delegitimising of stigmatised persons or groups is reproduced through complex processes taking place within all ecological levels that cannot be overcome or changed through individual behaviours (Edmiston et al., 2017). As stated above, Lucy engages in strategies to ameliorate some of the culture-bound negative impacts of sole motherhood and welfare receipt. Regarding Lucy’s skin condition, avoidance is the only strategy available to her. The current austere income allocation from welfare agency WINZ is not enough for her to afford, what she calls, “*luxuries*” like “*shouting myself to the doctors*”. In Aotearoa/New Zealand the slang term “shouting” refers to buying something for someone else, often as a treat. Lucy has stated that she would like to be able to pay for herself to go to the doctors. Lucy discusses receiving healthcare as an unattainable treat, which debunks the

neoliberal notion of equal opportunity and brings into focus structural health inequalities (Rimke, 2016).

Aotearoa/New Zealand has a subsidised healthcare system, however even a simple visit to the GP is not an option for Lucy. If she did visit the GP then this would have to come out of the meagre budget for paying her rent, power, and keeping her children warm, *“The fact is that I just can’t afford to go to the doctors, I just can’t afford it. I thought I would have been able to afford it last week, but I couldn’t”*. Lucy describes her skin condition as getting worse *“it’s just really painful. I think it’s gotten to the point where it’s probably internal... nothings working. Like I use my daughter’s creams...and nothing works, so I don’t know if I might need some antibiotics...But this is bad ...”* (original emphasis). Lucy has demonstrated how, often, women in her position would rather suffer illness and distress themselves than deprive their children of basic needs such as food, electricity, and housing (Jackson & Graham, 2017).

Healthism

Thus far I have interpreted Lucy’s skin condition as a structural marker of her suffering that impacts and undermines her physical, emotional, and social wellbeing. Further to poverty, labelling and stigmatisation, it is possible to apply the neoliberal-driven notion of health consumerism to Lucy’s suffering. Hegemonic discourses relating to health have situated the body as a site for ‘moral judgements’, where individuals are persuaded to behave responsibly by actively participating in the consumption of wellbeing products and services (Merrild, Risør, Vedsted, & Andersen, 2016; Rimke, 2016). Scharff (2015) describes this health consumerism phenomenon as an aspect of ‘entrepreneurial subjectivity’. Entrepreneurial subjectivity explores how neoliberal notions have become saturated in everyday life, where, amongst other criteria, viewing the self as a project to be worked on and

that remaining positive under all circumstances are key (Ehrstein et al., 2019). In our interview, Lucy had talked about “*evolving*”, I asked her to elaborate on what she had meant by that. Lucy proceeded to discuss multiple ways that she should be improving herself, finishing by stating “*That’s evolving, working on myself*”.

Aside from expressing a desire to “*evolve*”, Lucy also demonstrates her internalisation of entrepreneurial subjectivity and self by trying to remain positive in her difficult life circumstances “*I come across really positive*”. However, Lucy also shares that regarding her everyday life world, positivity can be hard work to maintain “*a downside of being so positive is that certain situations are actually quite big, like it’s [a really difficult] situation, like you’re in the shit*”, and, “*maybe they [people who witness her positivity] think that certain things aren’t affecting me, it’s like well (laughs) I’m not tough all the time*”. Due to the high level of resourcing required to implement aspects of healthism (such as disposable income, free time, access to childcare) it is considered to be a middle class phenomenon. However, Lucy has demonstrated that the individual expectations of healthism have permeated her low-income world, where her nonfulfillment positions her as ‘other’ (Scharff, 2015). Through a neoliberal lens, personal wellbeing and ill/health is typically viewed as an individual problem rather than an outcome of the impacts of multiple-level social determinants of health (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). Consequently, individual blame and responsibility are popularised as the explanations for ill/health negating the raft of evidence that points to structural inequalities that can lead to ill health and an early death (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Labonté & Stuckler, 2016; Rimke, 2016; Schrecker & Bambra, 2015).

Applying the notion of healthism to Lucy’s skin condition illustrates how she is blamed for not maintaining her health as well as for not seeking out a remedy so she can return to good health. Yet, as is clearly evident in Lucy’s account it is unreasonable to assume

that her worsening skin condition is simply because she does not want to take care of herself or receive treatment. Lucy is in pain and describes trying her best to use what is available to her to relieve her suffering, *“I’ve been using my daughter’s creams, because it’s all I have, it’s all I have...and nothing’s working”*. Under a neoliberal lens, Lucy is viewed as baulking the ‘moral’ social obligations toward her individual health and wellbeing. Therefore, she is placed outside of the moral envelope whereby she is socially excluded from the ‘good’ group of people who are able to maintain at least the appearance of good health through access to resources such as free time, mental ‘space’, and engaging in health consumerism (Rimke, 2016; Thorpe et al., 2015). Whereas, for Lucy, her condition is an embodiment of factors outside of her control, intensified by the structural barriers obstructing her access to healthcare and positive wellbeing.

Chapter summary

It has been well documented in a wide range of academic disciplines, that due to multifaceted oppressions, those surviving within punitive welfare systems can face multiple layers of marginalisation and disadvantage including to their physical health, psychological wellbeing, social participation, mothering, self-worth, identity, socioeconomic status, material wellbeing, and access to resources (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Schrecker & Bamba, 2015; K. E. Smith et al., 2015). Such poverty, discrimination, and hardship has crept under Lucy’s skin, becoming embodied and reproducing as physical illness painfully marking her as a failed neoliberal subject. Although there is much evidence to support the structural causes of stigma, social exclusion, and ill health, individual responsibility and blame persist, creating a treadmill of hardship for sole mothers accessing support from Work and Income New Zealand.

Chapter Four: Case Study Analysis – Rose

At the time of our interview conversation, Rose was no longer on a welfare benefit. However, Rose could speak from her own experiences of being on welfare in the past and she also spoke on the basis of her insights from other people's experiences of the welfare system. Rose currently works as a social worker and as an advocate, assisting women and whānau/families to navigate and access social services including assistance from Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ). Rose has four children, and she achieved her social work degree during her time as a sole mother. In addition to caring for her own children, Rose has at times cared for other children in her whānau through the practice of whāngai (the concept and practice of whāngai is discussed in *Participant engagements*). Throughout our interview conversation, Rose shared stories of her own engagements with WINZ as a sole mother, and also stories of her role as an advocate for others engaging with WINZ. Throughout this chapter the concepts of citizenship and work, motherhood, lack of understanding and care, accusations, and behavioural conditionality and paternalism are discussed within the context of Rose's experiences with the welfare agency WINZ.

Citizenship and work

In neoliberal terms, 'active' citizenship is understood as the pursuit of consumer rights (by engaging in a free market) and of responsibilities. The latter involves the responsibilities in providing for self, family, and to society through charity (Cheyne et al., 2008; Garthwaite, 2017; Pollack & Caragata, 2010). In addition, from a neoliberal perspective, being in paid work is a priority in relation to achieving individual responsibility (Humpage, 2015; Pollack & Caragata, 2010). However, for many sole mothers, engaging in the labour market is complicated, as is evident in the following quote from Rose,

I was on a benefit and I was trying to find work, I just couldn't get a job, you know, mostly because it had to be a nine to five job. And then there was another time where I was also studying fulltime, so I

was looking for no more than thirty hours [of paid work]. But trying to fit it [work] into childcare and childcare is only available between those hours [traditional business hours]. So, even when I had opportunities to work outside of those hours, there were no childcare providers [available], unless you've got a bloody nanny, which everyone knows you're not going to be able to [afford that].

Rose explained that structural factors such as the labour market had impacted her ability to find paid work. For sole mothers there can be limited opportunities for employment positions that are sufficiently aligned with childcare responsibilities and/or costs and availability of childcare facilities (Lightman et al., 2005; Lister, 2004). The socio-political prioritisation of paid employment tends to ignore the existence of barriers, such as the complexity of individual circumstances and a lack of suitable labour market opportunities (Lightman, et al., 2005). Further, neoliberal understandings posit that those who engage with the welfare system 'instead' of paid employment, must be doing so due to individual deficit behaviours (Cheyne et al., 2008). Neoliberal narratives refer to welfare engagement as 'passive' citizenship, describing welfare recipients with labels such as 'dependent' upon the state and 'unmotivated' to work (Cheyne et al., 2008; Pollack & Caragata, 2010; Standing, 2011). It is clear from Rose's quote that she was motivated to find paid employment but was constrained by factors outside of her control. Yet, Rose's location as a sole mother receiving welfare will continue to position her as 'dependent' and 'unmotivated', regardless of the challenges and impracticalities of her situation.

Neoliberal narratives such as 'dependent' and 'unmotivated' tend to position welfare recipients as 'less than' and as second class citizens who 'choose' to reject the socially constructed notion of 'active' citizenship (Cheyne et al., 2008; Garthwaite, 2017; Pollack & Caragata, 2010). Structural issues are often ignored when suggesting that those in poverty are consciously 'choosing' to reject full citizenship. Yet, broader notions of citizenship imply membership in society, that relies on a person's ability to fully engage in society. Such citizenship requires fair access to participation in social, political, economic, and cultural

aspects (Lister, 2004). As Rose's quote about finding work reflects, for those living in poverty, access to participation is often constrained or denied, often resulting in them being viewed as lesser citizens (Lightman et al., 2005; Pollack & Caragata, 2010). Rose also shared that she was aware of the negative stereotyping placed on her as a sole mother receiving welfare support. Although she could not secure suitable paid employment, Rose engaged in strategies to retain a status of 'good' and 'active' citizenship, "*because of the stigma, because I didn't want to be viewed as a problem*". Rose's strategy was to engage in voluntary work. Rose explained the socially and culturally-bound motivations behind her voluntary work engagements,

...so I would volunteer everywhere...and the reason I did that was because I felt like when people would say to me 'oh, so what are you up to now?', and they'd say 'oh are you working?', 'oh, no, no I'm not working at the moment but I've been doing some [voluntary] mahi [work] with Women's Refuge, I've been doing some [voluntary] mahi [work] with the Child Cancer Foundation', or 'I'm a [voluntary] budget advisor', or whatever you know. Cause I *wanted* to work but I just couldn't get a job. And the stigma of not having a job and then people knowing that, was the motivator behind me bloody volunteering everywhere. (Original emphasis).

The Women's Refuge is an Aotearoa/New Zealand safe haven agency for women and children victimised by family violence. As Rose stated here, when engaging in social situations, people in poverty are aware that their socioeconomic status may become apparent, which may undermine their status and lead to judgement and stigmatisation (Chase & Walker, 2013). Disclosure of poverty status can result in the co-construction of shame, whereby Rose feels shame and that she is being shamed, which can also facilitate a sense of disempowerment. This process of shame and disempowerment has the ability to undermine social connection and social status, and therefore social citizenship and solidarity. To avoid engaging in socioeconomic talk, Rose had taken conscious steps to avoid anticipated interactions of judgment from others (Chase & Walker, 2013). Furthermore, neoliberal ideals

suggest that charity and volunteerism, not a state welfare system, should be responsible for free market shortfalls in terms of for example, food insecurity (Cheyne et al., 2008). Rose may not have been able to participate in the paid employment sector, but her role as a volunteer offered her a legitimate ‘active’ citizenship status, and therefore the opportunity to resist the ‘irresponsible beneficiary’ label (Garthwaite, 2017; Pollack & Caragata, 2010). Rose’s actions to distance herself from neoliberal stigmatisation through her volunteerism were her efforts to salvage and maintain a dignified sense of self within her community.

Motherhood

Rose had attempted to mitigate her welfare and poverty induced shame and legitimise her citizenship by engaging in voluntary work. However, Rose’s strategy had unintended consequences for herself and her family,

And the truth was I actually needed to be at home a lot of the time and I needed to be taking care of stuff here [at home]. And I needed to be making more time to do homework [Rose was in full time study]. That was [all] more important...when really, I could’ve been a *really* good mother instead, you know rather than like being a half available mother who’s staying up late, getting up early, kind of running on an empty tank just to prove to everybody else that I’m a worthy person, yeah. (Original emphasis).

In her efforts to push back against ideological pressures, Rose had unwittingly taken on what feminist scholar Waring (1990), describes as the double burden. The double burden speaks of women engaging in the workforce (or working as volunteers), but still bearing the brunt of the majority of domestic care roles. For sole mothers, the burden is exacerbated by being solely responsible for income as well as bearing the brunt of all of domestic care roles. Considering the addition of Rose’s full-time study, one could argue that Rose was carrying a triple burden. In Rose’s case her voluntary work had played a mitigating role against the shame and stereotyping of welfare recipients and “*lazy beneficiary*” (Rose) narratives.

However, as Rose shared above, the consequences of following the neoliberal citizenship ideal of work had ultimately undermined Rose's personal and familial wellbeing.

Rose's work was unpaid. Therefore, her financial situation was not improved; although she gained status she remained in poverty. Living in poverty is time-consuming and stressful in and of itself (Lister, 2004). Rose was not only navigating poverty, sole motherhood, and full-time study, she was also taking part in unpaid work to maintain her position as a worthy citizen. Rose's hard work was unsustainable and took a toll on her health, as she shared that "*I got sick you know, and I'd keep going*". Neoliberalism posits that work, as an individual paid employee or charitable/societal activity, is the solution to life improvement. However, for Rose, taking on work had the opposite effect. Furthermore, the political and societal pressures of what constitutes a worthy contribution to society had impact on Rose's ability to perform her motherhood role. Rose confides, "*...I could've been a really good mother instead, you know rather than like being a half available mother who's... running on an empty tank just to prove to everybody else that I'm a worthy person...*". Since neoliberal ideology prioritises economic contribution, economically and politically speaking, the role of hands-on mothering is undervalued (Waring, 1990, 2003). The comments made by Rose show how structural political and economic narratives can become internalised by women such as Rose, creating added layers of hardship and undermining health, motherhood, and family life (Garthwaite, 2017). The neoliberal prioritisation of paid work delegitimises the work of mothering (Breheny & Stephens, 2009; Waring, 1990, 2003). The tensions evident in Rose's account, demonstrate how through a neoliberal lens her volunteer status was her only way to claim legitimacy as a 'active' and contributing citizen. Rose's mothering work in the context of being a welfare recipient, neoliberally speaking, is invisible and remains unseen as a useful contribution since it is not an economic one (Waring, 1990).

Being a sole mother receiving welfare can result in being judged as transgressing social norms (Breheny & Stephens, 2009). Sole mothers have long been judged as ‘immoral’, violating family and femininity ideals. Where the occurrences of sole motherhood and welfare receipt intersect, the judgment becomes compounded (Masters et al., 2014). During our conversation, Rose shared how she had felt judged within society for being a sole mother requiring welfare assistance. Additionally, Rose had experienced such judgements during appointments with WINZ case managers. In the next example, Rose discussed a situation that arose when she visited the WINZ office to submit the birth certificate of her new-born baby. Such documentation is necessary in order for a sole parent to receive income for their child. Rose explained the hostile reaction she received, “*she [the case manager] said to me ‘oh why has it taken you so long to bring in the birth certificate?’ , and I didn’t even get an opportunity to say, and she said to me ‘do you even know who the father is?’*”. Within this interaction, the case manager made the unfounded assumption that Rose’s engagement with WINZ must equate to ‘bad’ and ‘immoral’ choices (Masters et al., 2014). Rose did know who the father of her child was, however, Rose did not have time to reply. Instead, the case manager leapt to the stereotype based on the presumed immorality of sole parents (Breheny & Stephens, 2009; Masters et al., 2014). Interestingly, at the time of this interaction, WINZ policies stated that if a sole parent did not name the other parent in documentation then this would result in the permanent financial sanctioning of the applying parent. The case manager in this case made a policy-bound moral judgment against Rose. The case manager also demonstrated a lack of interest in Rose’s story or situation in not allowing Rose to respond to the accusatory question/statement.

Lack of understanding and care

Rose’s interaction with the case manager regarding the naming of her baby’s father demonstrates the power imbalances that occur between welfare beneficiaries and WINZ

agents. Aside from the moral accusations, the case manager also demanded to know “*why has it taken you so long...?*” to present the baby’s birth certificate, suggesting that Rose’s time must be justified to the case manager. This statement highlights the case manager’s expectation that Rose prioritises her responsibilities as a welfare beneficiary by providing the necessary documentation. The case manager demonstrated a lack of care and understanding for Rose’s personal circumstances and assumes that beneficiaries are time rich. As stated above, poverty and sole parenting are both time-consuming phenomena (Lister, 2004). The case manager’s questioning of Rose’s time has demonstrated her lack of respect for Rose’s privacy and dignity. Asking sole mothers degrading questions, such as “*do you even know who the father [of your child] is?*”, is also a demonstration of power, where the sole mother is reminded of their disempowered position (Masters et al., 2014; Pollack & Caragata, 2010).

The insinuation that being a sole mother means having low moral standards takes a considerable emotional toll. Due to her sole mother status, Rose stated that she still felt disempowered even when she pushed back against such accusations, “*I don’t feel empowered by doing that [standing up for herself]. I still feel like I’m on the verge of tears, I still feel like I’m going to cry, I still feel shaky, I still feel nervous, I still feel like I want to scream*”. In sharing these feelings, Rose had used the present tense. This is significant, as it reflects how, even though this interaction occurred years before, for Rose the rawness and intimacy of such a dehumanising experience was still being felt in the present. Interestingly, at the time of our interview, Rose shared that in her experience such uncaring and dehumanising interactions still remain commonplace. The emotions that still haunt Rose demonstrate the immediate and the long-term detrimental effects of a punitive welfare system that is underpinned by neoliberal stigmatisation and paternalistic approaches, which position sole mothers as disempowered and degraded individuals (Pollack & Caragata, 2010). Recently, scholars have used the term ‘structural violence’ to refer to the frequent and normalised culture of

beneficiary victimisation by WINZ staff and policies (see *Structural violence*) (Dutta et al., 2016; Hodgetts et al., 2013).

For Rose, and for sole mothers like her, WINZ offices can become sites of distress, fraught with anxiety, stigmatisation, and disempowerment (Hodgetts et al., 2013). A further demonstration of how WINZ offices are deliberately structured in an uncaring and structurally violent way is in their open plan layout. Figure. 3, illustrates the typical layout of a WINZ office, and how during the busy times there is no possibility of privacy. During meetings, WINZ case managers can pry into a welfare beneficiaries' budgets, ask private questions, or make personal and/or moralising accusations, leaving beneficiaries and their information exposed to others around them. The consequences of undignified and unkind office spaces for welfare 'clients' is demonstrated in Rose's following narrative. Rose shared a client story regarding a sole mother who had been referred to Rose through another social services agency. Rose accompanied this mother, we will call her Grace, to her introductory appointment with WINZ. Grace had fled a violent home situation the night before and needed an income and somewhere to live. Since WINZ offices are open plan, with no walls or dividers, there is no offer of privacy, respect, or dignity to people during these private and often distressing appointments. Grace, and others visiting a WINZ office, are required to share their personal details, troubling circumstances, suffer humiliating treatment, and bear emotions in open plan public spaces. During Grace's appointment she experienced uncaring and judgemental behaviour from the case manager she had been assigned, this led Grace to "*burst into tears*". Grace's appointment was experienced in an open plan office setting such as that seen in Figure. 3.



Figure 3. The standard layout of a Work and Income New Zealand office.

(Photo credit: Scott Hammond. July 15, 2016. Retrieved from Stuff: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/82087984/daily-life-as-a-work-and-income-case-manager-in-marlborough>)

In her position as a social worker and advocate, Rose shared how she often witnesses how women and families can become re/victimized during their engagements with WINZ. As a consequence, such families often avoid going to WINZ, which means that they suffer further hardship due to a lack of resourcing and assistance. Rose reflected on the reasons why such women and their families require advocates to accompany them to WINZ appointments,

...they [the people Rose works with] aren't confident to speak really, to have a voice. They often feel bullied, they often feel embarrassed, ashamed, and worthless. So, trying to advocate for themselves when they're feeling that way is next to impossible and as a result most people give up.

To demonstrate how the situation above can occur for the welfare recipients that Rose works with, Rose shared a story about a woman (who is not the aforementioned Grace) who had removed herself and her children from a violent home situation. This meant the woman needed to approach WINZ for assistance. This woman had explained to a WINZ case manager that, *"He's got everything. He's got everything in the house. I'm working but that [money] will be week to week...I just need help with bond and rent in advance"*. In denying

this woman's application for relatively minimal assistance, this particular case manager responded with *"well, that's your decision, you can always go back"*. There is a suggestion here that women should return to their violent partners instead of expecting welfare assistance. Structurally speaking, of particular note is the extent to which in Aotearoa/New Zealand culture there is a tendency to tolerate patriarchy and violence towards women and children (Robertson et al., 2007; Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Instead of doing more to address the shocking rates of domestic violence, sole mothers are marked with individual responsibility and blame labels by agents of the state, such as the WINZ case manager (Anglin, 1998).

Of importance, when case managers offer understanding and care to welfare recipients, this can make a substantial difference to their experience and wellbeing (Ballatt, Campling, & Maloney, 2020; Pollack & Caragata, 2010). Rose shared that, for a woman Rose had been working alongside, a mistake had been made by WINZ staff regarding an application the woman had made. The staff members could not get a hold of the woman, subsequently they went to the effort to reach out to Rose. They let Rose know that they would be rectifying the mistake straight away and that the WINZ staff members *"profusely apologise for the mistake"*. Rose stated that when she relayed the message to the woman affected that, *"hearing that the next day kind of lifted a little bit off her shoulders"*. Rose's reflection demonstrates how offering care and support is one way to facilitate meaningful difference to sole mothers who often live lives of hardship (Ballat et al., 2020).

Accusations

Rose shared many stories that depicted scenarios where WINZ agents utilised tools of *"power and control"* in their interactions with welfare recipients. Rose described an incident involving Grace (who was mentioned earlier) who had engaged with the Women's Refuge after fleeing a violent partner. The day following Grace's arrival at the Women's Refuge, the

staff there contacted Rose to ask for her help with Grace's upcoming appointment with WINZ. Rose accompanied Grace to her WINZ appointment to apply for a Sole Parent Support benefit. Once Grace had completed all of the necessary forms and provided all of the necessary evidence, for example identification, Rose shared that, "*the first thing she [the WINZ case manager] said was, 'I just need to be clear that I will process your application for you today, but I will also be forwarding a referral to our investigation team for benefit fraud'. And I said, 'excuse me?!'*". The case manager replied, "*I can see that she's [Grace] got love bites all over her neck, so I will be doing a referral to our investigation team for fraud*". Rose then felt she needed to disclose that Grace had in fact fled to Women's Refuge the night before, and that was why Grace was applying for welfare assistance. Without any apology, the case manager did not proceed with the fraud claim.

Based on neoliberal labelling narratives, accusations of lying and fraudulent behaviour are often made towards welfare recipients, Rose put it as "*the assumption is you are lying about your situation...that everyone that's a beneficiary is a liar*", often resulting in punitive treatment by state agents and policies. Beneficiaries are often seen as second-class citizens lacking in legitimacy and are seen not to be deserving of empathy or understanding. Hence, it is okay to judge and stereotype them. In the above scenario, the case manager had made a hasty judgement which was possibly underpinned by stereotypical narratives of dishonesty, immorality, and promiscuity regarding sole mothers on welfare (Masters et al., 2014). Such judgements can be problematic. In this case there was little to no consideration given to the context of Grace's current situation. In Grace's case, she had only recently left her violent partner and love bites can be visible for up to two weeks. Furthermore, Grace's love bites were not necessarily the result of consensual sex with her partner, his violence was what led her to leave after all and this violence could have led to the bedroom. The case manager's assumptions and moralising about Grace's sex life were diversions from the fact

that Grace was a woman who was in danger. Grace had just gone through traumatic and disruptive life events that meant she had taken the drastic action of leaving with little or no means to sustain herself and her children. Additionally, sole mothers are adult women who are entitled to have sex in their lives and should not be judged for something that most other adults are engaging in. Having sex with someone does not necessarily mean you are in a committed relationship with them. However, as both Rose and Grace had experienced, the sex lives of sole mothers are routinely scrutinised in the context of welfare receipt (Waring, 1990; Masters et al., 2014).

In the above scenario, the case manager threatening Grace with a government investigation demonstrates the power that case managers can have over the livelihoods and wellbeing of recipients (Pollack & Caragata, 2010). Grace who was already in a vulnerable position, as is often the case with people when they need to engage with the welfare system, was being personally and systematically re-victimised. Following the benefit fraud accusation, Grace “*burst into tears*”. Had Rose not been there to advocate for Grace, Grace may well have had the stress of a government fraud investigation added to her already traumatising life circumstances, or she may have disengaged with the welfare system out of fear, potentially leading to devastating financial hardship for her and her children. Furthermore, Grace was forced to share her private information with the case manager regarding her violent home situation and engagement with the Women’s Refuge and do so in an open plan space. Often women in violent home situations have not divulged such information to even their closest friends and family (Robertson et al., 2007). In seeking support after escaping intimate partner violence, Grace had become revictimized through structural violence within a state agency.

Behavioural conditionality and paternalism

Within welfare systems that are influenced by neoliberalism, power dynamics and punitive policy and action are also enacted through behavioural conditionality and paternalism (Curchin, 2017; Gray, 2019; Parsell et al., 2020; Standing, 2011). As a result of such neoliberal underpinnings, welfare beneficiaries are viewed as needing to be managed and controlled, and they are more likely to be spoken down to in a patronising manner. Rose shared a narrative regarding a personal experience of when she herself was requiring assistance from WINZ. Rose was required to provide a budget of her weekly incomings and outgoings to WINZ. WINZ policies and agents demanding proof of financial expenditure and money management are behavioural conditions based on paternalistic ideas of welfare recipients not having the skill or the desire to spend *their* money in ways that the *agency* deem to be appropriate (Gray, 2019; Standing, 2011). Rose shared,

They [WINZ] said to me, “We [WINZ] need to see your bank statements and we need to see a budget”. So, I do my budget and I show them my bank statements and they said, “I’m sorry but we can’t accept this budget”. I’m like but the budget matches what the bank statements say what’s the problem? “Oh no we need a qualified budget advisor”, “I [Rose] am a qualified budget advisor”, “you need to see Tauranga Budget Advisory Services”, “I volunteer as a budget advisor”. I still had to go back again [to the budget service] ...So, I’m also having to go through the humiliation of having to ask people who I trained with or *who I trained* to prepare a budget for me, just to satisfy their [WINZ] evidence. You know, like even when you upskill, even when you do everything right, they’re [WINZ] still going to find a way to humiliate you. (Original emphasis).

Above, Rose’s account demonstrates an example of some of the paternalistic behavioural condition’s welfare recipients are obligated to perform. Promoters of neoliberal paternalism claim that prying into Rose’s personal spending habits and private bank records are ‘for her own good’ (Mead, 1986, cited in, Standing, 2011). However, for Rose, having to perform demeaning, humiliating, and time consuming obligations had a negative impact on herself and on her social connections. Moreover, those surviving on low incomes often become

excellent money managers through necessity (Curchin, 2017). Yet, Rose's previous experience as a budget advisor was ignored and her budgeting skills were not given any credence.

Rose had no choice but to abide by the budgeting obligations set out by WINZ policies and staff, as noncompliance could have led to her being sanctioned. In many cases, the reasons for being denied a benefit, or for being sanctioned are not always understood, or known by beneficiaries (Curchin, 2017). For welfare recipients, the threat of benefit sanctions is ubiquitous. The constant threat of being punished with sanctions, that is, having income reduced or stopped, has welfare recipients feeling chronically disempowered, anxious, and stressed (Standing, 2011). Furthermore, paternalistic behavioural conditionality reveals a paradoxical phenomenon for neoliberalism in that neoliberal ideals place individual responsibility and blame on those in poverty for their own hardship, yet paternalism posits that individuals are not capable or skilled enough to know what is best for themselves (Curchin, 2017; Standing, 2011).

Rose shared another incident in which she described being treated like a naughty child by a WINZ case manager. In this particular incident, Rose shared that she had defended herself against inaccurate and degrading comments made by a case manager who was facilitating her appointment. Following Rose's moment of courage, she shared that, "*She [the case manager] just goes 'oh, I don't like your attitude...you can go and wait over there, and I'll come and get you later'".* Rose described her experience as an attempt by the case manager to "*put me in the naughty corner*". Although welfare recipients are under constant threat of being sanctioned at the discretion of case managers' personal judgements, Rose exhibited courage and personal agency by requesting to see the office manager. Rose's experience demonstrates the power that some case managers try to assert over welfare recipients and of the double standard regarding respect and dignity between the two parties.

Neoliberal welfare narratives of paternalism position welfare recipients as needing behaviour modification due to their supposed individual lacking and deficit behaviours. Such systemic behavioural expectations can then inadvertently position case managers as “*social engineers*” and “*social police offices*” in their administration of welfare resources (Standing, 2011, p. 34).

It must be acknowledged that the negative attitudes and behaviours exhibited by some case managers towards beneficiaries are not formed within a vacuum (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). Case managers work within a socio-political system with rules and expectations that they are expected to adhere to (Anglin, 1998; Parsons, 2007). Additionally, at play is the complex system that has over time positioned beneficiaries as delegitimised and undeserving. Requiring case managers to police beneficiaries supposed deficit behaviours can work to undermine the developing of positive relationships between case manager and ‘client’ (Pollock & Caragata, 2010). Furthermore, the systemic creation of such power imbalances can also locate welfare recipients as under the control and judgement, instead of the compassionate assistance, of WINZ agents. Both case manager and recipient can be adversely impacted by the ongoing processes of the structural violence forces that underpin a punitive welfare system (Anglin, 1998; Pollock & Caragata, 2010).

Chapter summary

For Rose and for the people she works alongside in relation to WINZ, they face an often punitive system. Citizenship and mothering ‘choices’ often become constrained and are riddled by expectations of behavioural conditionality. In addition to the ill-treatment from within the punitive welfare system, sole mother beneficiaries are also subjected to social marginalisation and exclusion. Due to complex socioeconomic-political structures, engaging with WINZ policies and staff often leads to dehumanising, disempowering, and stigmatising consequences for sole mother welfare recipients and their families. Conversely, offering sole

mothers understanding and care offers them dignity, respect, and the much needed support they are seeking when engaging with WINZ and its staff.

Following on from the analyses, next I discuss the findings.

Chapter Five: Discussion, future research, and conclusion

Lucy and Rose

Lucy, a mother of three, consistently demonstrated throughout her narrative the double consciousness struggle she had between sole motherhood welfare receipt and being an active and contributing citizen. Where I argue that sole motherhood and/or welfare receipt should not negate full and active citizenship, ultimately for Lucy the neoliberally constructed incongruent nexus between the two concepts have rendered her unwell and stigmatised. Regardless of the hard work and fortitude that Lucy has exhibited, she remained in a life of impoverished precarity due to the structural socioeconomic positioning of her delegitimised and under-resourced position.

Through her narrative, Rose, a mother of four and carer of many, had relayed her concern for the current state of the Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare system and of the negative effects it has brought to the lives of those she advocates for. Rose shared that through her own past, and then throughout her professional role, that experiences of hardship, unkindness, and insufficient resourcing have remained the status quo.

Among many other issues, both participants spoke about their own experiences and examples of stigma, shame, inadequate income, meeting paternalistic obligations, and of negotiating negative stereotypes with their own view of self. Of importance, both women also spoke of the love and care they had for their children, and their desire to live lives of wellbeing with their families and to also have recognition of their value to society as people, Māori, women, and mothers. By foregrounding participant narratives, there is the potential to document and ‘reveal’ the life worlds of sole parent struggles, desires, and hopes for their families (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012; Thomas, 2010). With such insight, readers can gain a sense of connection to another’s life world (Thomas, 2010), while also considering a broader

picture (Gorski & Pothini, 2018), potentially fostering empathetic generalisation (Hodgetts et al., 2019).

Through sharing their experiences and perspectives within a case study approach, Lucy and Rose were able to assist in the inquiry into maladaptive macro social conditions, by providing life world examples of how the personal is intimately linked to the socioeconomic-political, and vice versa (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). Through ongoing interpretive analysis throughout the research process (Groot & Hodgetts, 2014), I was able to establish and critique complex links between micro life experiences to macro social structures (Frost & Ouellette, 2011). Demonstrating that macro structures such as, hegemonic cultural narratives, normative ideologies, political issues, and economic structures have significant impact on the wellbeing of people and their families (Rimke, 2016).

Neoliberal welfare

The present study argues that the currently neoliberal underpinned application of the Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare system has a failed policy approach. State welfare provision is intended to assist citizens with income support during times of hardship (Cheyne et al., 2008). However, the current delivery of welfare in Aotearoa/New Zealand largely systematically undermines the wellbeing of sole mothers and contributes to their poverty and hardship (Gray, 2019). Informed by relevant research, the current study contributes to foregrounding the neoliberal failures and contradictions present within the Work and Income New Zealand system.

A neoliberal economic approach prioritises free markets and economic growth over social wellbeing (Gray, 2019). A free market economy supports the concept of meritocracy, whereby it is believed that each individual has equal freedom to engage in the market (Standing, 2011). However, as is demonstrated through Lucy's and Rose's narratives, how this logic plays out in everyday life is quite different to the claim. To assert equal

opportunity, we would need to assert a liberated society (Riemer et al., 2020). As this study has shown, Aotearoa/New Zealand has yet to even achieve equality, so are far from achieving liberation (Gray, 2019; Starke, 2008; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). The current free market thinking, and austerity measures have contributed to the present inequality experienced by those inhabiting the lower socioeconomic strata (Gray, 2019; Roper, 2008; Starke, 2008). Inequality can be found in many societal institutions including health, education, socioeconomic, political, cultural, and within the justice system (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). Therefore, the practice of a free market economy has been shown to undercut the theory. Free market economies have typically benefited those already at the top, largely at the expense of those at the bottom (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). The sharp rise in the cost of housing is one example, that has tended to support landlords, while exacerbating precarity for many renters (Carr, Edgeworth, & Hunter, 2018). Where freedom of choice is constrained and opportunities are unequal, a free market economy will continue to support inequality, undermining its own claims.

Paternalism and behavioural conditionality, as discussed above, are WINZ tools used to ‘incentivise’ beneficiaries into paid work (Standing, 2011). Researchers have cited leading neoliberal advisor, Lawrence Mead, as having argued that the rationale behind paternalism and behavioural conditionality is that state agencies know what is best for beneficiaries and that such policies are for beneficiaries’ own wellbeing (Curchin, 2017; Standing, 2011). However, regarding paternalism, Mead also strongly advocated to political elites that “*those on welfare should be taught to blame themselves and to internalise the consequences*”, which logically does not appear conducive to wellbeing (Curchin, 2017, p. 241). The paternalistic claim is that sole mothers are incapable and unmotivated to do what is best for themselves, their children, and society. However, the core neoliberal principle of individual responsibility asserts that sole mothers are responsible for their own hardship and are to be blamed for it.

The paradox here is that sole mothers are deemed too incapable of responsible adult decision-making yet, are held solely responsible for their precarious life circumstances. Not only are sole mothers positioned within a contradictory context, the state sanctioned precarity of their situations makes adhering to behavioural conditions, at times, implausible (Standing, 2017). Furthermore, WINZ claims of paid work as being best for all sole mothers is an example of a blanket approach policy. Paid work is not a clear or guaranteed pathway out of poverty for sole mothers (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). Blanket approach policies ignore personal context and need. Ignoring the genuine need of sole mothers undermines the potential for the genuine enactment of welfare state provision of true social protection and actual support of wellbeing (Curchin, 2017).

The dominant narratives regarding beneficiaries, particularly sole mothers, has positioned them outside of the social moral envelope (Opatow, Gerson, & Woodside, 2005). Populist agendas have appealed to the ‘majority’ by making unsubstantiated claims that ‘their’ tax money is being taken by those on welfare (Standing, 2011). Sole mothers are routinely misrepresented as lazy, as fraudulent, and of being unfit parents, while those in paid work are referred to as hard working taxpayers (Lister, 2004; Waring, 1990, 2003). There is the assumption here that those in power have intimate knowledge of the everyday lives of sole mothers and of paid workers. Furthermore, such dichotomous thinking oversimplifies the complexities of engaging in paid work for sole mothers, as well as devaluing their work as stay-at-home-mothers (Lister, 2004; Waring, 1990). Both Lucy and Rose expressed, in their own ways, the tensions between paid/voluntary work and motherhood. The two women shared the stress, pressure, and stigma that they experienced due to neoliberal ideals of individual responsibility and economic prioritisation, which also had ripple effects to their health, families, and social connections. Such generalising statements that label mothers as non-workers have been deliberate ideological claims to discredit the legitimacy of sole

mothers and to conceal the adverse structural impacts of neoliberalism (Beddoe & Keddel, 2016; Standing, 2011). Research suggests that there is enough public support to retain a welfare system (Humpage, 2010). However, due to the socially embedded negative stereotypes of beneficiaries, the majority public supports a continued punitive approach. Though the complex lived experiences of poverty may be too distant for more affluent people to comprehend, bringing forth first-person narratives of those most greatly affected by structural violence's can work to bridge the social divide.

Cutting back on the income provision for sole mothers has been a conscious tactic to make welfare receipt uncomfortable and hard. Governments discuss children as a 'deserving' group and have purported working towards reducing and ending child poverty (Lister, 2006). However, the 1980s neoliberal welfare reforms that facilitated an increase in child poverty, have yet to be readjusted to align with current wage rates. Which could be understood as the enduring attitude towards sole mothers of being 'undeserving'. Nonetheless, children of sole mothers *live* with their sole mothers, and where the parents are deliberately disadvantaged, so are the children (Lister, 2006). Herein lies another neoliberal fallacy. Furthermore, child poverty continues to be disseminated as an individual failing due to the moral family breakdown, bad parenting, and poor decision-making. The consequences of poverty can be devastating, dangerous, and life threatening. Laying an avoidable state failing regarding protecting children's wellbeing on to sole mothers is cruel and degrading and perpetuates social 'othering'. Furthermore, research into public opinion of welfare found that most believed the beneficiary stereotype and many who did not believe it still could not see an alternative to the current neoliberal approach (Humpage, 2010). The individual deficit focus and punitive approach have not proven to solve the problem of child poverty for the past four decades, which suggests they are flawed policy approaches that require change. However,

continuing to stigmatise sole mothers as ‘underserving’ demonstrates a symbolic process of power, which functions as a socioeconomic-political tool (Barnett et al., 2007).

The structural violence present within the current WINZ system and physical office spaces, work to oppress and marginalise welfare recipients (Hodgetts et al., 2013). Navigating the system can be confusing and contradictory, furthermore, beneficiaries are often subjected to denial, scrutiny, and humiliation. As shared by Rose, many of those she works alongside would rather face intensified struggle than continue to navigate the violence of the welfare system. Additionally, the internalisation of individual responsibility and meritocracy can make asking for additional help shameful. When mothers are denied assistance, they are forced to hunt out free food to feed their children (Jackson & Graham, 2017). In addition, in the patriarchy tolerant context of Aotearoa/New Zealand, many women who engage with WINZ are doing so due to leaving a violent relationship (Robertson et al., 2007). Women are required to disclose these intimate details to often unempathetic staff members in open plan office settings, undermining their dignity and leaving women re-victimised. These examples of structural violence speak to the failing of WINZ to implement citizen protection, support, and wellbeing.

Recently, the current Aotearoa/New Zealand government created the Welfare Expert Advisory Group (WEAG) to evaluate the current welfare system. Meetings were set up across the country to foster the inclusion of welfare recipient voices. Although, the welfare community was consulted, praxis towards change was lacking. The WEAG (2019) provided 42 recommendations regarding restoring dignity back into the welfare system, however, to date the government has committed to implementing three. Regarding the report by the WEAG, the current government has been offered experiential knowledge from those most greatly impacted by welfare policies, yet policies have remained largely unchanged. Politicians and policy makers have agency in their decision-making and action and can

choose to constrain or to support people's full citizenship and participation (Beddoe & Keddeh, 2016). Regarding some aspect's governments are at the mercy of the majority consensus (Frost & Ouellette, 2011; Gorski & Pothini, 2018), but they also have the ability to create policies, narratives, and social environments that foster collectivist attitudes and social solidarity.

Community psychology

In some ways many mainstream psychologies have contributed to the neoliberal agenda (Rimke, 2016). Individualised approaches to personal and social issues such as therapy, behaviour change, and resilience building can work to conceal possible structural causes of psychological suffering. While one-on-one approaches can be helpful and required in the immediate, to foster long term change a broader approach is necessary (Rimke, 2016). The durability of adverse social conditions can in some respects be attributed to the extent to which they remain unquestioned. Community psychology (CP) prioritises the inclusion of contextual and ecological factors to address structural issues of oppression and social injustice. Applying critical analyses that challenge the adverse status quo can assist in the deconstruction of the adversity in question.

Regarding the current research, through respectful and dignified narrative exploration, I have sought to challenge individual deficit narratives and make visible the oppressive structures that amalgamate to create a structurally violent welfare system. Through their narratives, Lucy and Rose have dispelled the populist stereotype put upon them as sole mother welfare recipients. Both women have demonstrated their hard work, commitment to their children, and tenacity in the face of immense adversity. Lucy and Rose also discussed ways in which they contribute to their communities and to society. Furthermore, like most, they have expressed their desire for a good life for themselves and their children. Utilising narrative and ecological approaches have allowed me to draw links between the everyday

lives of Lucy and Rose, and the broader neoliberal processes that have real world consequences for them. My hope is that the research findings firstly, foster empathetic generalisation between those with no experience of the welfare system and welfare recipients, as empathetic generalisation has the potential to stimulate social solidarity. Secondly, this research contributes to the body of research that works towards systemic transformation of adverse social structures and the current punitive welfare system.

Future research

Throughout this research process, including reviewing the literature, the prevalence of sole mothers requiring welfare assistance due to escaping violent relationships has been evident. The focus and scope of this project did not allow for the in-depth exploration of the circumstances and impacts for women who flee violent home situations and require welfare assistance in order to survive. However, I propose this topic requires further attention. Of particular interest and importance is understanding and unpacking the nexus and consequences of victimisation from violent home situations and the victimisation from structural violence within WINZ. Following similar approaches to that in this research of person centred narrative frameworks and structurally focused analyses, could be useful in future research undertakings.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to gain understandings of the lived experiences of sole mothers accessing support from the Aotearoa/New Zealand welfare agency, Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ). Exploring and interpreting the lived experiences of Lucy and Rose allowed for unique first person narratives of welfare phenomena. Utilising Lucy's and Rose's experiences permitted an in depth analysis of the human impacts of the current punitive welfare system. Foregrounding first-person experience makes visible the ways in

which socioeconomic-political phenomena have personal and intimate consequences. People in delegitimised groups are often marginalised and silenced, masking the human cost of macro level choices. However, through applying collaborative frameworks and ecological analysis, community psychology can make visible the complex systems that impede personal and societal wellbeing. Foregrounding the structural causes of hardship and the lived experiences of sole mothers works to challenge the stigmatising stereotypes. Disseminating an alternative narrative may foster greater public support for reimagining the current welfare state system. Through such work and through engaging in the political arena community psychology can contribute to the aspirations of social justice and human flourishing.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Ethical approval

28 June 2018

Nikki Wade
18 Smiths Road
Matua
Tauranga 3110

Dear Nikki

Ethics Approval Application – # 18:15

Title: The experiences of sole mothers accessing support from Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ)

Thank you for your ethics application submitted for approval which has been fully considered and approved by the Psychology Research and Ethics Committee.

Please note that approval is for three years.

If any modifications are required to your application, e.g., nature, content, location, procedures or personnel these will need to be submitted to the Convenor of the Committee.

I wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely



Dr Rebecca Sargisson
Convenor
Psychology Research and Ethics Committee
School of Psychology
University of Waikato

Appendix 2 - Participant information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Kia ora,

Thank you very much for considering taking part in this research project titled: *The experiences of sole mothers accessing support from Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ)*. This information sheet explains what the project is about and what your participation may involve.

What is this research project about?

The aim of this research project is to gain a greater understanding of the realities that sole mothers may experience when engaging with the welfare agency WINZ. I am keen to talk with sole mothers aged 18-64 years who are currently accessing support from WINZ and live in or near Tauranga.

Who is the researcher?

My name is Nikki, and I am a psychology student at the University of Waikato (Tauranga) undertaking this research project toward the completion of my Master of Applied Psychology (Community psychology) degree.

My supervisor is Dr Otilie Stolte, a social science senior lecturer at the University of Waikato.

What will your participation involve?

Firstly, your participation is voluntary, and you can choose to withdraw at any time without disclosing the reason. I plan to meet and talk with five women, for two interviews each. Our meetings would be approximately one hour each and will involve open-ended questions about your experiences with WINZ. You can choose which questions you wish to answer or not. With your permission our conversations would be audio recorded with only myself and my supervisor having access to these. I would also be keen to have you create piece of work such as a mind map, drawing or poem to reflect your experiences. Again, it is up to you whether you would like to complete this creative exercise and would not affect your continuing in the project if you chose not to do this. You will be provided with the full transcripts of your own interviews to review. You will have the opportunity to provide feedback on or withdraw your interview contributions for up to two weeks after receiving your transcripts.

What will happen with the information you provide?

The information you provide in our interviews will be kept strictly confidential. Your information will be treated with respect and will be protected throughout and after the research process by not mentioning your name or any other identifying information. The findings from this research may contribute to a broader understanding to what life is like for those who engage with WINZ services and may be utilised in the write up of my thesis research project. You will be provided with a summary of the research results. The full thesis will also be made publicly available on the University of Waikato website.

Want to participate?

Please take some time to consider participating in this research project. If you decide you would like to participate, please complete and sign the attached consent forms, one is for my records and one is for you to keep. If you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact either myself, Nikki Wade on 022 166 2010 or at nikkiwade2911@gmail.com, or my supervisor Dr Otilie Stolte on (07) 838 4466 ext. 9231 or at otillie@waikato.ac.nz. This research project has been granted ethical

approval from the University of Waikato Psychology Research and Ethics Committee, should you wish to contact the convenor of the committee please contact, Dr Rebecca Sargisson, on (07) 837 9580 or at rebecca.sargisson@waikato.ac.nz.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Appendix 3 – Participant consent form



CONSENT FORM

A completed copy of this form should be retained by both the researcher and the participant.

Research Project: The experiences of sole mothers accessing support from Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ)

Please complete the following checklist. Tick (✓) the appropriate box for each point.	YES	NO
1. I have read the Participant Information Sheet (or it has been read to me) and I understand it.		
2. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether or not to participate in this study		
3. I am satisfied with the answers I have been given regarding the study and I have a copy of this consent form and information sheet		
4. I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw myself from the study at any time without penalty		
5. I understand that I will have the opportunity to review my interview transcripts and provide feedback or withdraw my interview contributions up to two weeks after being sent my transcript		
6. I have the right to decline to participate in any part of the research activity		
7. I know who to contact if I have any questions about the study in general.		
8. I understand that my interviews will be audio recorded.		
9. I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material, which could identify me personally, will be used in any reports on this study.		
10. I wish to receive a summary of the research results		

Declaration by participant:

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I may withdraw at any time. If I have any concerns about this project, I may contact the convenor of the Psychology Research and Ethics Committee (Dr Rebecca Sargisson, phone 07 837 9580, email: rebecca.sargisson@waikato.ac.nz)

Participant's name (Please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Declaration by member of research team:

I have given a verbal explanation of the research project to the participant and have answered the participant's questions about it. I believe that the participant understands the study and has given informed consent to participate.

Researcher's name (Please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 4 – Ethics amendment approval letter

30 August 2018

Nikki Wade
18 Smiths Road
Matua
Tauranga 3110

Dear Nikki

Ethics Approval Application – # 18:15

Title: The experiences of sole mothers accessing support from Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ)

I am pleased to advise that the amendments as listed below, you wish to make to your ethics application, have been approved.

In my original ethics application, I have been granted approval to recruit, as my participants, sole mothers who access support from Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ). I wish to make an amendment to my initial application, which is to also include the recruiting of a social services advocate, from one the previously approved community organisations, as a participant in the research.

The advocate and I have developed a respectful rapport through our engagements regarding this research project. The advocate works alongside women who require advocacy when engaging with services, including WINZ, and has expressed interest in participating in the research project. My rationale for the above amendment is that the advocate has approached me and is keen to contribute. Also, an advocate in the social services sector may offer another perspective to the research topic area, which may provide additional findings to the research project. Furthermore, participant recruitment has been slow with my intended target participant group, and as time is passing quickly, the addition of another participant to the project would be appreciated.

I intend to follow the same interview procedures as outlined in my initial ethics application. However, I will have no interview schedule as to allow the participant to set the agenda around the topic area and I will use prompts and follow up questions from there.

Yours sincerely



Dr Colin McLeay
Psychology Research and Ethics Committee
School of Psychology
University of Waikato

Appendix 5 – Interview guideline: Lucy, first interview

Interview guideline for first interview with Lucy

These are the questions I anticipate asking, however, if the participant steers the conversation in a direction that is still relevant to the focus of the research, I will follow their lead.

1. What were the circumstances that lead to your accessing support from WINZ?
2. Do you remember your first encounter with WINZ?
 - a. If so, can you describe it and how you felt?
3. Tell me what kind of benefit and/or entitlements you receive?
 - a. Do you find this is sufficient to cover your and your family's needs?
 - b. Tell me more about that?
4. How long have you been receiving support?
5. Do you stay at home parent, study, work, other or a combination?
 - a. What are the challenges and/or the positives for you in that?
6. Can you describe to me how WINZ impacts or influences your role as a mother?
 - a. Positive impacts? Negative impacts?
 - b. What feelings do you have about this?
7. What do you feel has the greatest impact on your family's life and wellbeing?
8. Do you have social support around you?
 - a. Tell me about them?
9. Tell me about the best or most positive experience you've had with WINZ?
10. Tell me about the worst or hardest experience you've had with WINZ?
11. Are there any consistent challenges you come across in your experiences of WINZ?
12. Are there any consistent positives you come across in your experiences of WINZ?
13. What are your general overall feelings when you think about or engage with WINZ?
14. Is there anything more you would like to share today?

Appendix 6 – Interview guideline: Lucy, second interview

Interview guideline for second interview with Lucy

These are the questions I anticipate asking, however, if the participant steers the conversation in a direction that is still relevant to the focus of the research, I will follow their lead. Also, questions that we did not get a chance to discuss in the first interview may also be asked in the second interview.

1. How did you feel after our last conversation?
2. How are you feeling about it now?
3. Have you had any engagements with WINZ since our last conversation? If so, tell me how that went?
4. Tell me about your creative piece?
 - a. What does it mean for you?
 - b. What do you feel when you look at/read it?
5. In your experience, what do you feel WINZ is doing right?
6. In your experience, what do you feel WINZ is doing wrong?
7. Do you have any ideas why WINZ policies/benefit levels/entitlements for sole parents are the way they are?
8. Do you see any connections between WINZ policies and wider society? For example, do you think that the ways sole parents are viewed in society affects welfare policies?
9. Do you think any wider changes are needed in society beyond what WINZ policies and what WINZ staff do or do not do?
10. What would you recommend they change?
 - a. What changes do you think would benefit your family most?
11. Is there a particular story or message that you would like to convey? Tell me about it?
12. Is there anything more you would like to share today?

Appendix 7 – Interview guideline: Rose

Rose - Advocate interview guideline

1. Tell me about your role as an advocate and what that entails?
2. Do you get the opportunity to form strong relationships with your clients? Have you come to know some of your clients quite well?
3. Do you meet with your clients in different spaces/locations? Can you list any of the places? Do clients generally open up, or demonstrate more comfort in some places more than others? Can you elaborate on that for me?
4. In regard to accessing support from WINZ, what are some of the challenges and/or positives you see sole mother's experiencing?
5. Can you describe to me the ways in which you have witnessed WINZ impacting or influencing women's roles as mothers?
6. What are some of the consistent positives you come across in your experiences of WINZ?
7. What are some of the consistent challenges you come across in your experiences of WINZ?
8. Do you have any ideas or thoughts as to why WINZ policies/benefit levels/entitlements for sole parents are the way they are?
9. Do you see any connections between WINZ policies and wider society? For example, do you think that the ways sole parents are viewed in society affects welfare policies?
10. Do you think any wider changes are needed in society beyond what WINZ policies and what WINZ staff do or do not do?
11. In your experiences what do feel WINZ is doing right and what do you feel they are doing wrong?
12. What would you recommend they change?
13. What changes in society would you like to see?
14. In your experience what changes do you think would most benefit the women and whānau you have worked with?
15. Has there been anything major that you've noticed since being an advocate that you wish you would have known when seeking support from WINZ yourself?
16. Is there any particular story or message you would like to convey today?
17. Is there anything more you would like to share today?

Appendix 8 - Karakia

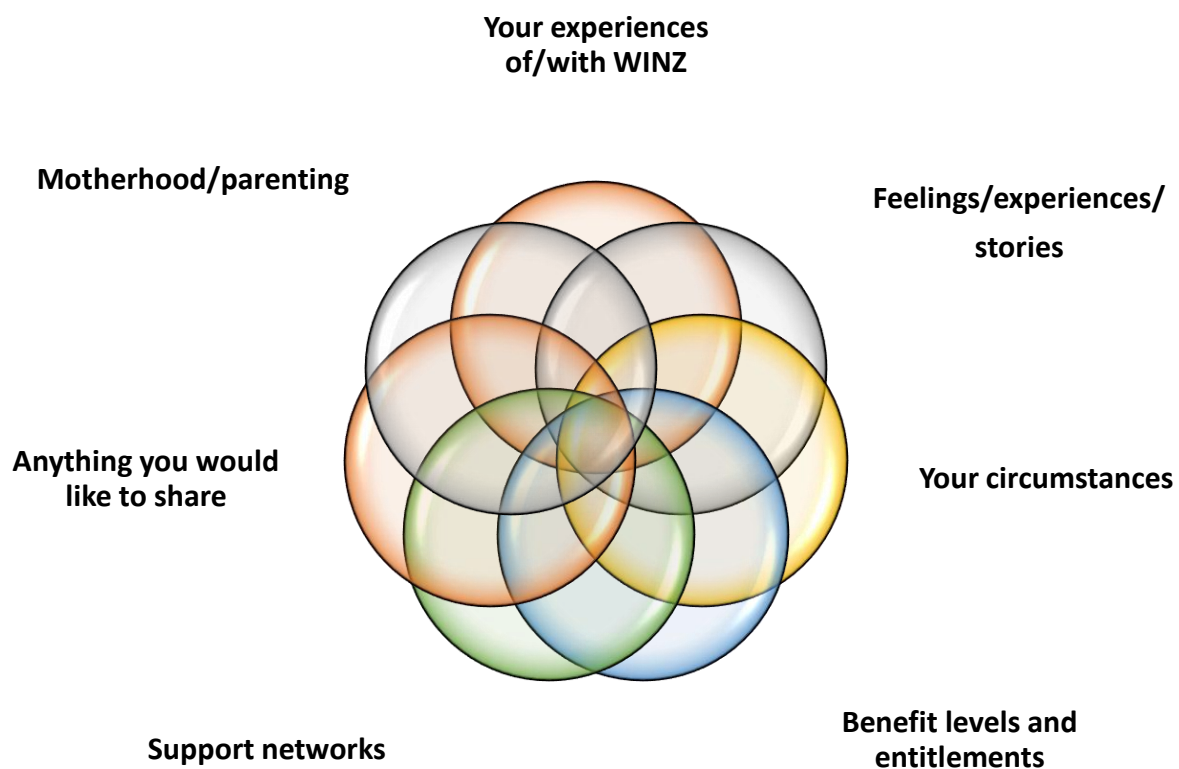
Karakia to open participant and researcher time and sharing together – He honore

He honore, he kororia ki te Atua
Maungarongo ki te whenua
Whakaaro pai ki ngā tāngata katoa. Āmine.

All honour and glory to God
Let there be peace on earth and tranquillity.
Goodwill to all people. Amen.

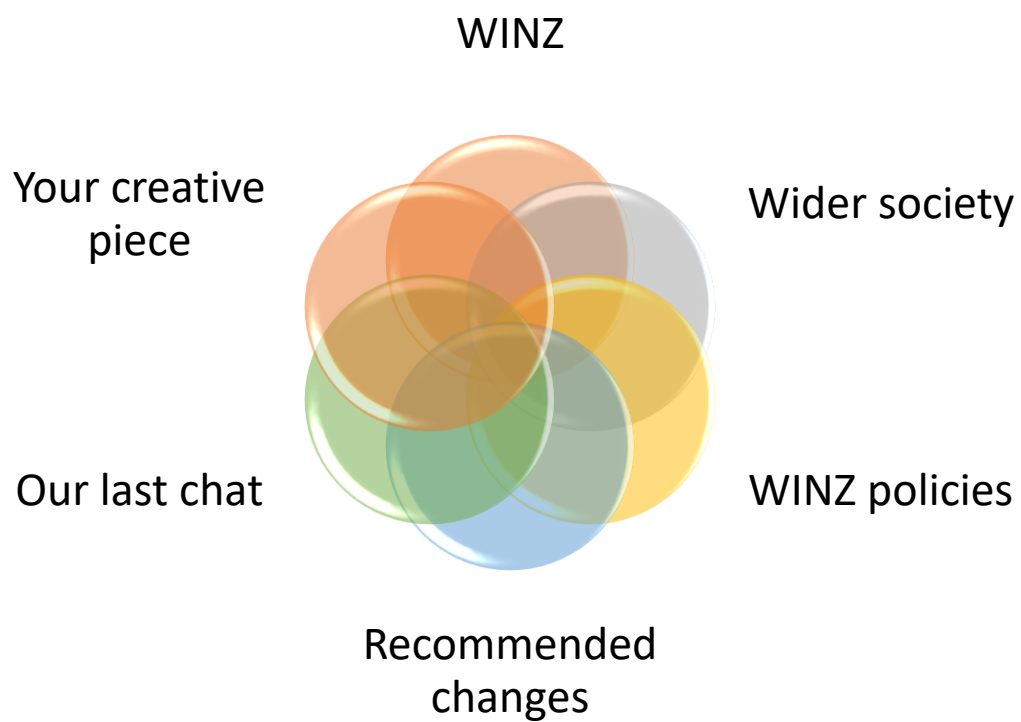
Appendix 9 – Interview topic theme sheet: Lucy, first interview

Themes/topics

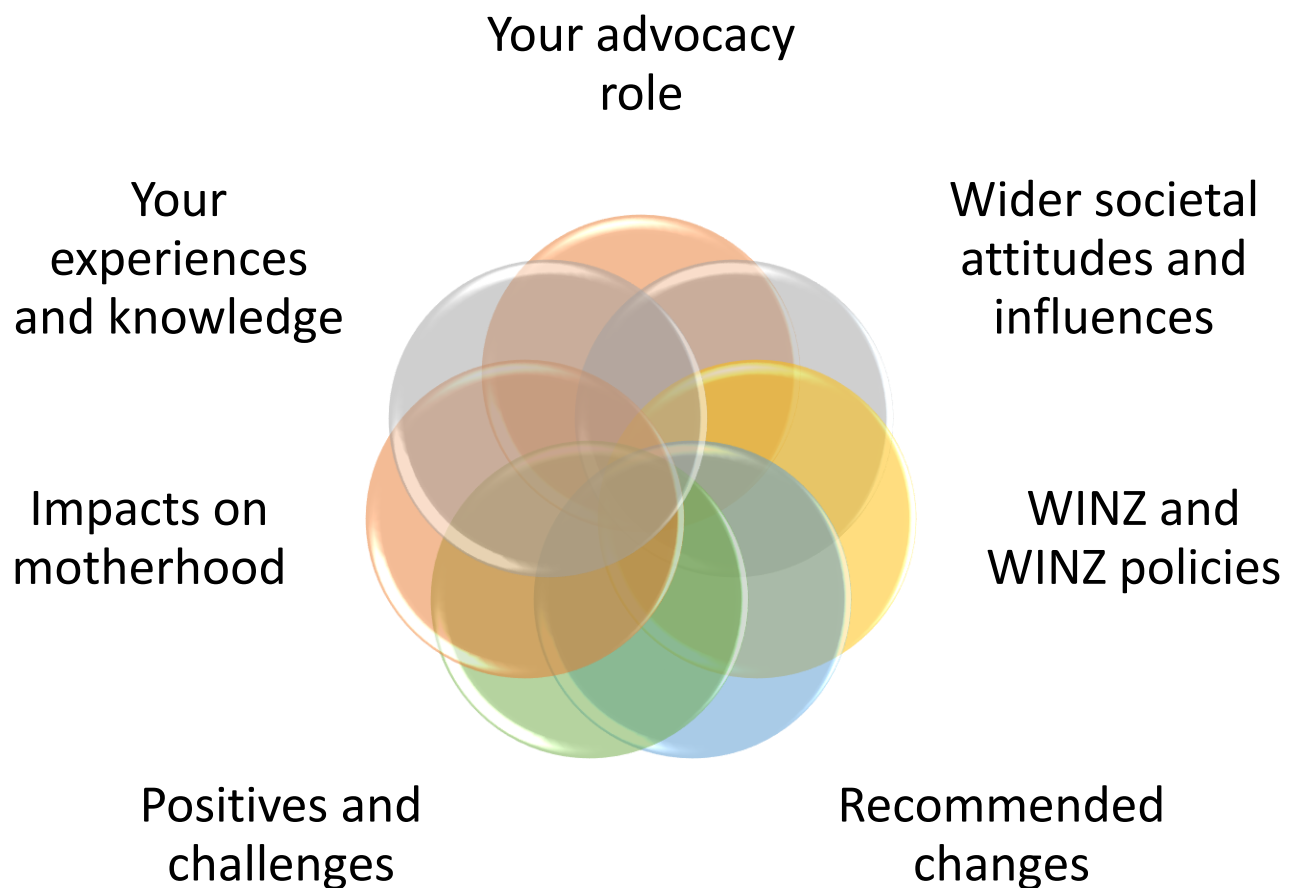


Appendix 10 - Interview topic theme sheet: Lucy, second interview

Themes/topics



Discussion themes



Glossary of Māori words and terms

All entries are referenced from Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary (2020), unless otherwise stated.

Please note that the translations provided here apply to the context in which they were used, variations in differing contexts and dialects are possible.

Aotearoa	New Zealand
iwi	extended kinship group, tribe
kai	food, sustenance
kanohi ki te kanohi	face-to-face (Waitoki, Rucklidge, Feather, & Robertson, 2016)
kaupapa	topic, purpose, issue
kaupapa Māori	Māori approach, Māori customary practice, Māori ideology - a philosophical doctrine, incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values of Māori society
Kaupapa Māori Research	kaupapa Māori approaches to research (Smith, 2012, p. 185)
kia kaha	be strong, keep going
koha	gift, offering, contribution - especially one maintaining social relationships and has connotations of reciprocity.
manaaki	to support, take care of, give hospitality to, protect, look out for - show respect, generosity, and care for others
manaakitanga	hospitality, kindness, generosity, support - the process of showing respect, generosity, and care for others
manuhiri	visitor, guest
Māori	indigenous person/peoples of Aotearoa, to be Māori, apply in a Māori way
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent
Tauranga/Tauranga Moana	a harbourside city in Aotearoa New Zealand
te ao Māori	the Māori world, a Māori world view
te Tiriti o Waitangi	the Treaty of Waitangi

teina	younger brother (of a male), younger sister (of a female), cousin (of the same gender) of a junior line, junior relative
tikanga	correct procedure, way, protocol - the customary system of values and practices that have developed over time and are deeply embedded in the social context
tikanga Māori	Māori protocols, convention, custom, protocol (Waitoki et al., 2016)
tīpuna	ancestors, grandparents, plural form of tipuna
tuakana	elder brother (of a male), elder sister (of a female), cousin (of the same gender from a more senior branch of the family), prefect
wāhine	women, females, ladies, wives – plural form of <i>wahine</i>
whakawhanaungatanga	process of establishing relationships, relating well to others
whanaungatanga	relationship, kinship, sense of family connection - a relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging. It develops as a result of kinship rights and obligations, which also serve to strengthen each member of the kin group. It also extends to others to whom one develops a close familial, friendship or reciprocal relationship